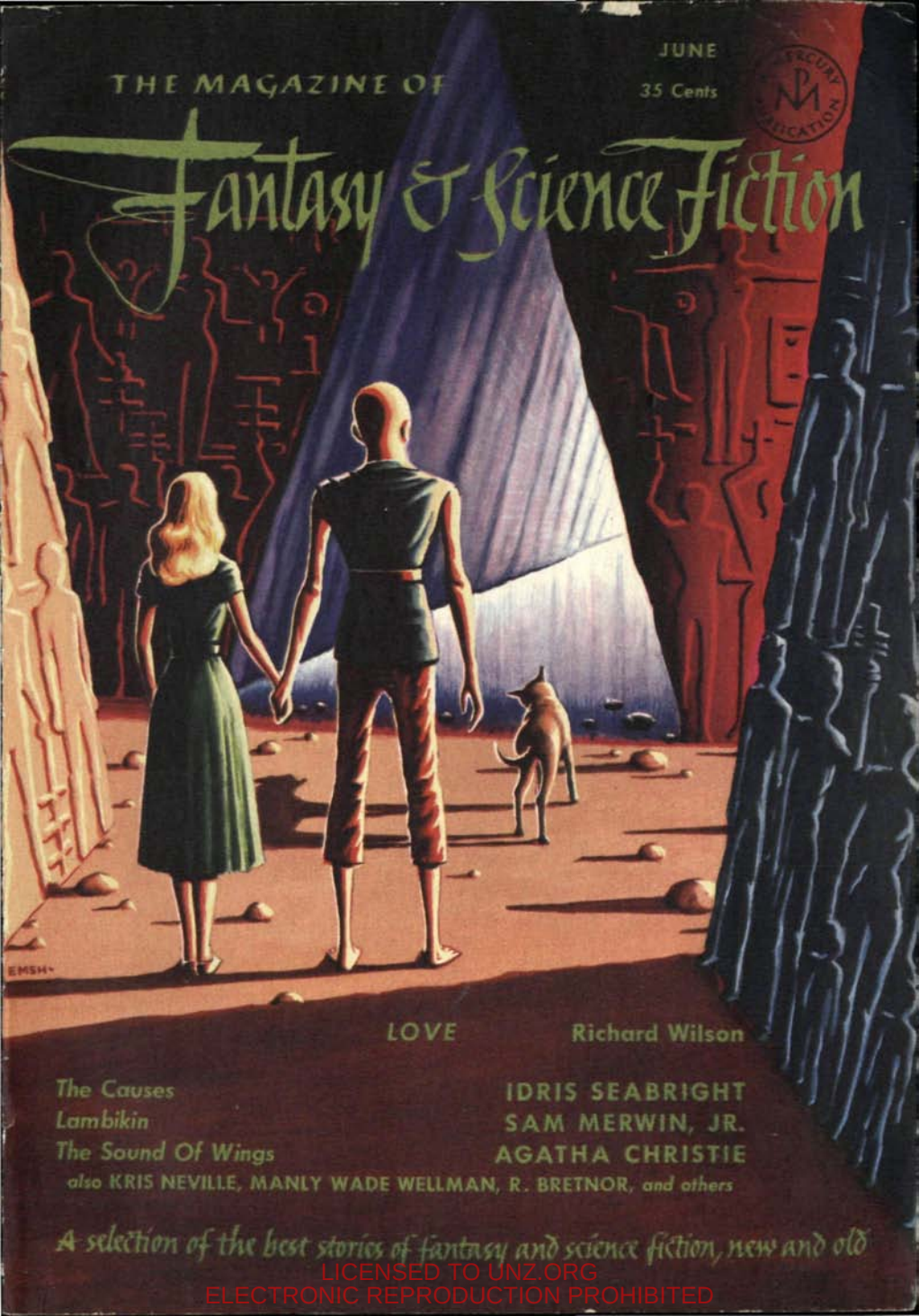

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THE MAGAZINE OF

Fantasy and Science Fiction

VOLUME 3, No. 3 JUNE, 1952

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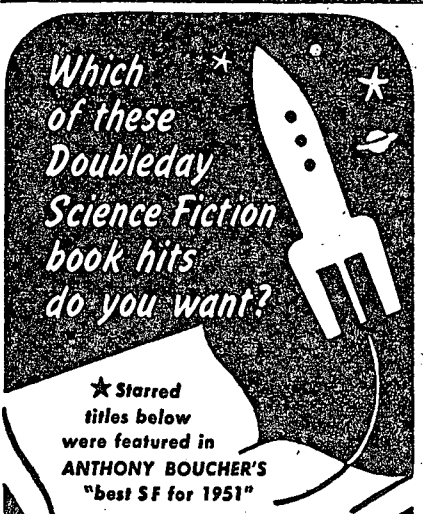

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Richard Wilson, like so many science fiction writers, began young and published a great number of pulp stories in his early twenties. Unlike most, he then took a lay-off of some seven years and devoted himself to such matters as the running of wire services. Now as New York Bureau Chief of Transradio Press he has somehow found time to return occasionally to science fiction, with an enviable new maturity — as he demonstrates in one of the most sensitive and touching treatments of that delicate subject, physical love between natives of different planets.

Love

by RICHARD WILSON

He was from Mars and she was from Earth; and you know what they thought of Martians in those days. He wasn't very tall, as Martians weren't; but that was all right, because she was unusually tiny and only came to his shoulder. They made fun of a Martian's anatomy then. There were a lot of jokes made by professional so-called comedians, just as it had once been considered funny to tell stories about Jews and Scotsmen.

Maybe Jac wasn't much to look at, by the standards of Earth model agencies, but he was intelligent and kind and Ellen loved him. She shouldn't have told her father that, she knew now. It had been difficult enough to be with Jac before the night she'd gone to her father with the confession of her love. He'd stormed up and down the living room of their house at the edge of the spaceport. He'd talked about position and family and biological impossibility. He'd invoked the memory of her dead mother and reminded her of the things he had sacrificed to give her the education *he'd* never had: the special schools and the tutoring. He said that if she could *see* this Martian — this Jac person — she'd understand his point of view and thank him for his efforts to spare her the anguish she would experience as a girl who had crossed the planet line. He didn't stop till he had brought tears to the blind eyes of his daughter.

Only then did he become calm and, with a faint twinge of conscience, tell her as gently as he could that she was not to see the boy again. He would see Jac, he told her, and explain to him that the thing was impossible.

Ellen felt her way to her room and locked the door against him, and

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finally she heard her father go down the hall and slam his own door.

She refused to go down for breakfast the next morning. She waited till she heard her father leave the house to go to his job in the weather station of the spaceport. Then she left by the back way.

She heard the rattle of Pug's chain against the kennel and his bark of greeting. She knelt and took the paw he offered. It had been broken once and never properly set. She stroked it gently, although it no longer hurt him; it just made him limp. Ellen unhooked the chain from his collar and fastened a short leash to it. She and the dog went through the streets and into the Martian section of the town.

The whole community had been the Martians' originally. But after the coming of the Earth people they'd been gradually uprooted and forced into one end of town. Spidertown, she'd heard some people call it. Damn people like that, she thought. People like her father! "Damn them," she said aloud. And Pug growled in sympathy.

She bent down to pet him. He whimpered inquiringly. "Poor crippled Pug," she said. "A blind girl, a lame dog, and a Martian. Outcasts, Pug. That's us." Then she shrugged off her self-pity and walked on.

There was only one really bad crossing. It was a highway and the ore trucks rolled along it all day long, carrying their loads to the spaceport and the great Earthbound cargo ships. But the traffic man at the edge of the highway knew her and walked across with her and Pug.

"Beautiful morning, Miss Hanson," he said.

She said it smelled good and the air felt real fresh and thanked him.

Jac met her in the park at the edge of the lake. She tingled to the touch of his hand on her arm. His fingers were slender and quite bony and his arm, when he put hers in his, was thin. But he was strong, she knew: once he had picked her up and carried her across a rough patch of ground in the hills where they sometimes walked. He had carried her effortlessly, she remembered, and she had heard the strange rhythm of his heart as she leaned her head against his hard chest.

"Hello," Jac said. "Hello, my girl and my girl's dog."

"Hello, Jac," she said, and Pug wagged his tail so furiously that it beat against her leg. Pug didn't care if Jac was a Martian, and she wished her father had as much judgment.

They went arm-in-arm across the park to the meadows beyond. Pug was unleashed now and frisked about them, his bark echoing flatly in the Martian air.

"This is a beautiful day — one should be so happy," Jac said. "And yet you look unhappy. Why?"

And so Ellen told him, and Jac was silent. For a long time they walked

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in silence until the ground began to rise and Ellen knew they were nearing the hills.

Jac said at last, "Your father is a good man, and the things he wishes for you are things I cannot give you."

"If you're going to sound like my father," she told him, "I won't listen."

Then he was silent again for a time, but soon he began to speak seriously, and the gist of what he said was that she must forget him because he had been selfish about her. He said he had never really considered that there would be more to their life than just the two of them, and that they must not break her father's heart.

And she asked him, what about *her* heart? And his, too, he said.

And so they were silent again.

"Where are we?" she asked, after a while. They had been climbing for some time.

"I don't know," he said. "I have been thinking too much about us."

"Are we lost?"

"No," he said. "I can see the way we have come. But this is a part of the hills I don't know. You must be tired from the climb. We will rest."

They sat on the soft moss-covered ground amid some rocks and she leaned against his chest. Was he so different from Earth men? she wondered. It was so hard to know — for a blind person to know. If she could see Jac, would her father's warnings mean more to her? Or was her father merely intolerant of anyone who was different?

She had known so few men. Mostly, after childhood, her companions had been men who were kind to her for her father's sake. Many of them had been good fun and friendly, but none had ever been interested in her as a woman. Why should they waste their time with a blind girl? They hadn't, and Ellen had known no intimacy, no real happiness, until Jac.

But now she asked herself if she really loved him, as she maintained to her father, or whether she was grateful to him. What did she know of love? If she had once loved an Earth man, could she now love Jac?

It was so difficult. Her standards were confused. She did not even know what an Earth man looked like.

"Let me touch you, Jac," she said.

He gave her his hand and she seemed to feel his eyes on her face.

Her fingers traveled up his familiar arm, to his shoulder. The shoulder was bony and sharp, but so was hers. His neck was thick and his chin was not so well defined as her father's. Jac's nose was broader, too, and his eyes were sunk deep in his head. The head was hairless, not partially, like her father's, but completely. Ellen knew it was not usual for Earth men to be hairless, not men as young as Jac. Ellen put her hand against his chest. It

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was hard and rounded and there was that strange rhythm of his heartbeat. She took her hand away.

"How do I seem to you?" she asked.

If their races were so different, wouldn't he be repelled by her — by the thought of her body and his together in marriage?

"You are beautiful to me, Ellen," he said. "You are lovely."

She sighed.

"But this does not mean that *I* would seem attractive to *you*," he went on. "I must say to you truthfully that I believe Earth people are more appealing to Martians — from an esthetic point of view, if not a political one — than Martians are to Earth people. But," he added, "I believe a Martian retains his good physical attributes until death. He does not become fat, or senile, or ill. He doesn't wrinkle and sag as do some of your people. I think this is in favor of your happiness."

"I must seem cruel to you," Ellen said, "to be so questioning of our love."

"No," Jac said, "you have a special problem. You must really know me before you can be sure."

Would he look strange if I could see him? she thought. Would I be ashamed that he is bald and big-nosed and chinless? She used these descriptions in her thoughts deliberately to see if they bothered her. Would the rest of his body disgust me if I knew it? I know him to be intelligent and loving, brave and devoted, honest and good. But would these qualities have meant anything to me, if I had been able to see and I had discovered them in him?

There was no answer.

"Where's Pug?" she asked.

"I don't know. He went over a rise some time ago."

Ellen stood up. "Let's look for him. You must want to know where we are, anyhow."

They walked slowly in the direction the dog had gone. The way was rocky and the path seemed to become narrower. It grew chill as the sun became hidden by a cliff. They walked along the base of the cliff and soon a second cliff was on the other side and they were in a canyon.

Jac described it to her as they went.

Suddenly he touched her elbow and they stopped.

"Now I know where we are," he said. "I've never been here before, but I know from the stories I've heard."

"Where?"

"This is the Valley of the Stars. We have a legend that it was first found at night. And at the end of it is the Cave of Violet Light. It's a beautiful

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legend. The Cave was found long ago. Then the way to it became lost. That was many years ago, before my father's time. But it is just as *his* father described it. The walls of the Valley are carved with lifelike figures from our antiquity. Here, some of the carvings are down low and you can feel them."

He placed her fingers and she traced out figures of people.

"We do not know what period of our history they represent, but the figures are Martian. Here," he said, "is the carving of a very young child — and a woman." He led her fingers.

Hesitantly, her fingers explored the carvings while his hand rested reassuringly on her shoulder. "The figures are unclothed," she said.

"Yes."

The carvings were right to her touch and yet elusively, indefinitely wrong. Perhaps she could not judge the relative proportions. She could not tell. She became uneasy. "Why, it's only a baby — the child," she said.

"No," Jac said. "The child is three or four years old."

Her hand dropped.

Jac took her arm. "Come," he said, "we'll see if Pug went this way. Toward the Cave."

She walked in silence beside him.

"The Cave is the real source of the legend. The Cave of the Violet Light. They say it is magic. They say it has healing properties — the Violet Light. That whoever stands in its glow is made well. That the lame walk, and the deaf hear, and the —"

He stopped, and Ellen felt him looking at her.

"Yes?" she said. "And the blind?"

"And the blind see."

Jac continued, "It is a legend that linked with a time when we Martians ceased to become ill and to suffer the effects of age and deterioration. Our forefathers, so cured, bestowed the gift on all their descendants."

There was a barking in the Valley, echoing around a bend, and in a moment the dog was frisking toward them.

Ellen knelt and petted him.

"Hello, you Pug," she said. "Were you exploring? Were you in the Cave of the Violet Light?"

She could feel the dog's body moving as the tail wagged hugely.

"Were you?" she asked. "Were you in the Cave? Let me have your paw!"

The dog extended his paw to Ellen. She felt it.

"The other one!" she cried.

It, too, was whole. No bump or sign of a break anywhere.

"Jac!" she cried. "Does he limp? Pug, I mean. Is he healed?"

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"Silly girl. It's just a legend."

"Look at him!" she said. "Does he limp?"

"No. It is amazing, but he's well. Come here, Pug. Let me see your paw. The bad one. He *is* well, Ellen."

"Oh, Jac!"

"I have never really believed it possible — and never really disbelieved," he said slowly. "I suppose we Martians are less preoccupied with miraculous cures because we have so little need of them."

"But, Jac, it *must* be true!"

He took her hand, and they started down the Valley of the Stars in the direction of the Cave.

"Here is the bend," Jac said. "And there is the Cave."

"Describe it to me," she said. "Tell me how it looks."

"The entrance is like a triangle. As high as three men. There is rubble of fallen rock in front and a little way inside. And then it is clean and the floor is smooth, polished rock. And farther back there is a violet glow. It seems to come from the slanting walls, and the floor is like a deep pond."

"I've never seen in my life," Ellen said. "I was born sightless."

She felt herself trembling.

"I'm told violet is a beautiful color," she said. "Is it beautiful?"

"It is the most beautiful color I've seen. It's past description. It's so beautiful that you must be able to feel it if the light touches you."

Then he asked: "Will you go in?" His voice was hushed. It caressed her and soothed her and she stopped trembling. She loved him, now, the way she knew him. His thin hand was gentle and strong — holding hers.

The words leaped into her mind: Bald. Big-nosed. Chinless. What did these words mean visually? What were ugliness and beauty to one who had never seen anything?

She remembered the figures her fingers had traced in the wall of the Valley of the Stars. The woman. The child — who was not a baby.

And she shivered.

Jac's hand tightened until her hand hurt. "You are afraid you will see me and find me ugly. In your mind they have made me something monstrous because I am different!"

"Let us go away," she said miserably. "I love you."

He was silent for a long while.

"If the Cave will let you see me," he said at last, "then you must. In the darkness, shadows become terrible things."

Her hand touched his face gently. He kissed the slim, cold fingers.

"Will you go in?"

"Yes," she whispered.

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One of the major aspects of the profession of editing is known in the trade as The Care and Feeding of Authors; and as in other branches of Care and Feeding, it is exceedingly important to see that the proper liquids are administered. When we recently encountered Idris Seabright at a science fiction convention, we duly steered her to the nearest bar; and as can only happen in San Francisco (or occasionally in New York), this unobtrusive neighborhood tavern turned out to be not quite like any other bar anywhere. Its peculiarities you will find accurately portrayed in this story, along with a few other oddities that only Miss Seabright could invent. Too many writers set fantasy stories in bars so lazily depicted that one suspects the authors of charter membership in the WCTU; but Idris Seabright (thanks, we feel smugly, to our proper attention to Care and Feeding) has produced a bar-fantasy to rank with the greatest goings-on at Gavagan's.

The Causes

by IDRIS SEABRIGHT

"God rot their stinking souls," the man on the bar stool next to George said passionately. "God bury them in the lowest circle of the pit, under the flaying ashes. May their eyeballs drip blood and their bones bend under them. May they thirst and be given molten glass for liquid. May they eat their own flesh and sicken with it. May they —" He seemed to choke over his rage. After a moment he lifted his glass of stout and buried his nose in it.

"You Irish?" George asked with interest.

"Irish? No." The man with the stout seemed surprised. "I'm from New Zealand. Mother was Albanian. I'm a mountain climber. Why?"

"Oh, I just wondered. What are you sore about?"

The man with the moustache patted the newspaper in his pocket. "I've been reading about the H-bomb," he said. "It makes me sick. I'm cursing the scientists. Do they want to kill us all? On both sides, I'm cursing them."

"Yes, but you have to be reasonable," the man on the second bar stool beyond George argued, leaning toward the other two. "None of us like that bomb, but we have to have it. The world's a bad place these days, and those Russians — they're bad cookies. Dangerous." Uneasily he shifted the trombone case he was holding on his lap.

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"Oh, sure, they're dangerous." The man with the stout hesitated, sucking on his moustache. "But basically, the Russians have nothing to do with it," he said. He cleared his throat. "I know what you're going to say, but it's not true. Our real trouble isn't the Russians . . . We're in the mess we're in because we've lost our gods."

"Hunh?" said the man on the second bar stool. "Oh, I get it. You mean we've become anti-religious, materialistic, worldly. Ought to go back to the old-time religion. Is that what you meant?"

"I did not," the man with the stout said irritably. "I meant what I said. The gods — our real gods — are gone. That's why everything is so fouled up these days. There's nobody to take care of us. No gods."

"No gods?" asked the man on the second bar stool.

"No gods."

The interchange began to irk George. He finished his drink—bourbon and soda — and motioned to the bartender for another. When it came, he said to the man with the moustache, "Well, if we haven't got any gods, what's happened to them? Gone away?"

"They're in New Zealand," the man with the moustache said.

He must have sensed the withdrawal of his auditors, for he added hastily, "It's all true dinkum. I'm not making it up. They're living on Ruapehu in Wellington — it's about 9,000 feet — now, instead of Olympus in Thrace."

George took a leisurely pull at his drink. He was feeling finely credulous. "Well, go on. How did they get there?" he asked.

"It started when Aphrodite lost her girdle —"

"Venus!" said the man on the second bar stool. He rolled his eyes. "This ought to be hot. How'd she lose it?"

"Her motives were above reproach," the man with the stout said stiffly. "This isn't a smutty story. Aphrodite lent the girdle to a married woman who was getting along badly with her husband for the most usual reason, and the girl was so pleased with the new state of things that she forgot to return it. The couple decided to take a long cruise as a sort of delayed honeymoon, and the woman packed the girdle in her trunk by mistake. When Aphrodite missed it — Olympian society goes all to pieces without the girdle; even the eagles on Father Zeus's throne start fighting and tearing feathers — it was too late. The ship had gone so far she couldn't pick up any emanation from it."

"When did all this happen?" George asked.

"In 1913. You want to remember the date.

"Well, as I was saying, she couldn't pick up any emanation from the girdle. So finally they sent Hermes out to look for it — he's the divine messenger, you know. And he didn't come back."

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"Why not?" the man on the second bar stool asked.

"Because, when Hermes located the ship, it had put in at New Zealand. Now, New Zealand's a beautiful country. Like Greece, I guess — I've never been there — but better wooded and more water. Hermes picked up the girdle. But he liked the place so much he decided to stay.

"They got worried then, and they sent others of the Olympians out. Iris was first, and then the Muses and the Moirae. None of them came back to Olympus. Those left got more and more alarmed, and one big shot after another went out hunting the girdle. Finally by 1914 there wasn't anybody left on Olympus except Ares. He said he didn't much care for the girdle. Things looked interesting where he was. He guessed he'd stay.

"So that's the situation at present. All the gods except Ares, and once in a while Athena, are on Ruapehu. They've been there since 1914. The Maori are a handsome people anyhow, and you ought to see some of the children growing up in the villages around there. Young godlings, that's what they are.

"Athena doesn't like it there as well as the others. She's a maiden goddess, and I suppose there isn't so much to attract her. She keeps going back to Europe and trying to help us. But somehow, everything she does, no matter how well she means it, always turns out to help that hulking big half-brother of hers."

"Interesting symbolism," George said approvingly. "All the gods we've got left are Ares, the brutal war god, and Athena, the divine patroness of science. Athena wants to help us, but whatever she does helps the war god. Neat. Very neat."

The man with the moustache ordered another bottle of stout. When it came, he stared at George stonily. "It is not symbolism," he said, measuring his words. "It's the honest truth. I told you I was a mountain climber, didn't I? I climbed Ruapehu last summer. I *saw* them there."

"What did they look like?" George asked lazily.

"Well, I really only saw Hermes. He's the messenger, you know, and it's easier for people to look at him without being blinded. He's a young man, very handsome, very jolly-looking. He looks like he'd play all kinds of tricks on you, but you wouldn't mind it. They'd be good tricks. He — you could see him shining, even in the sun."

"What about the others?"

The man with the stout shook his head. "I don't want to talk about it. You wouldn't understand me. They're too bright. They have to put on other shapes when they go among men.

"But I think they miss us. I think they're lonesome, really. The Maori are a fine people, very intelligent, but they're not quite what the gods are

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used to. You know what I think?" The man with the moustache lowered his voice solemnly. "I think we ought to send an embassy to them. Send people with petitions and offerings. If we asked them right, asked them often enough, they'd be sorry for us. They'd come back."

There was a stirring four or five stools down, toward the middle of the bar. A sailor stood up and came toward the man with the moustache. "So you don't like the government?" he said menacingly. There was a beer bottle in his hand.

"Government?" the man with the moustache answered. George noticed that he was slightly pop-eyed. "What's that got to do with it? I'm trying to help."

"Haaaaaa! I heard you talking against it," said the sailor. He swayed on his feet for a moment. Then he aimed a heavy blow with the beer bottle at the center of the moustache.

The man with the moustache ducked. He got off the bar stool, still doubled up. He drew back. He rammed the sailor hard in the pit of the stomach with his head.

As the sailor collapsed, the man from New Zealand stepped neatly over him. He walked to the front of the bar and handed a bill to the bartender who was standing, amazed, near the cash register. He closed the door of the bar behind him.

After a moment he opened it again and stuck his head back in. "God damn everybody!" he yelled.

After the sailor had been revived by his friends and pushed back on a bar stool, the man with the trombone case, who had been on the far side of the stout drinker, moved nearer to George.

"Interesting story he told, wasn't it?" he said cheerily. "Of course, there wasn't anything to it."

"Oh, I don't know," George answered perversely. "There might have been."

"Oh, no," the man with the trombone case said positively. He shook his head so vigorously that the folds of his pious, starchy, dewlapped face trembled. "Nothing like that."

"How can you be sure?"

"Because . . ." He hesitated. "Because I know what the real reasons for our difficulties are."

"Well, what's your explanation?"

"I—I don't know whether I ought to say this," the starchy man said coyly. He put his head on one side and looked at George bright-eyed. Then, as if fearing George's patience might be on the edge of exhaustion, he said, quite quickly, "It's the last trump."

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"Who's the last trump?" the man on the bar stool around the corner from George asked, leaning forward to listen. George knew him by sight; his name was Atkinson.

"Nobody," the starchy man answered. "I meant that the last trump ought to have been blown ages ago. The world is long overdue for judgment."

"H. G. Wells story," George murmured.

"I beg your pardon?" said the starchy man.

"Nothing." George motioned to the bartender and ordered a round of drinks. Atkinson took gin and ginger ale, and the starchy man kirschwasser.

"Why hasn't the trump been blown?" Atkinson asked, with the air of one tolerating noisy children.

"Because it's lost," the starchy man replied promptly. "When the time came to blow it, it wasn't in Heaven. This wicked, wicked world! Ages ago it should have been summoned to meet its master." He drooped his eyelids.

George felt his tongue aching with the repression of his wish to say, "Plagiarist!" Atkinson said, "Oh, fooey. How do you know the trump's been lost?"

"Because I have it here," the starchy gentleman answered. "Right here." He patted his trombone case.

George and Atkinson exchanged a look. George said, "Let's see it."

"I don't think I'd better . . ."

"Oh, go on!"

"Well . . . No, I'd better not."

Atkinson leaned his elbows on the bar and rested his chin on his interlaced fingers. "I expect there's nothing in the trombone case actually," he said indifferently. "I expect it's only a gambit of his."

The soft, wrinkled skin of the man who was drinking kirschwasser flushed red around the eyes. He put the trombone case down on the bar in front of George with a thump, and snapped open the lid. Atkinson and George bent over it eagerly.

The trombone case was lined with glossy white silk, like a coffin. Against the white fabric, gleaming with an incredible velvety luster, lay a trumpet of deepest midnight blue. It might have been black, but it wasn't; it was the color of deep space where it lies softly, like a caress, for trillions of miles around some regal, blazing star. The bell of the trumpet was fluted and curved like the flower of a morning glory.

Atkinson whistled. After a moment he paid the trumpet the ultimate tribute. "Gosh," he said.

The man with the trumpet said nothing, but his little mouth pursed in a small, tight, nasty smile.

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"Where'd you get it?" George queried.

"I'm not saying."

"How do you know it's the last trump?" Atkinson asked.

The starchy man shrugged his shoulders. "What else could it be?" he asked.

The door at the front of the bar opened and three men came in. George watched them absently as they walked the length of the bar counter and went into the rear. "But . . . you mean if this thing were blown, the world would come to an end? There'd be the last judgment?"

"I imagine."

"I don't believe it," Atkinson said after a minute. "I just don't believe it. It's an extraordinary looking trumpet, I admit, but it can't be . . . that."

"Ohhhhh?"

"Yes. If it's what you say, why don't you blow it?"

The starchy man seemed disconcerted. He licked his lips. Then he said, in rather a hostile tone, "You mean you want me to blow? You mean you're ready to meet your maker — you and all the rest of the world — right now? Right this minute? With all your sins, with all your errors of commission and omission, unforgiven and unshriven on your head?"

"Sure. That's right. Why not? The longer the world goes on existing, the worse it'll get. As to sins and all that, I'll take my chances. They couldn't be much worse than what —" Atkinson made a small gesture that seemed to enclose in itself the whole miserable, explosive terrestrial globe — "than what we have now."

Under his breath, George quoted, " 'We doctors know a hopeless case —' "

The starchy man turned to him. "Do you agree with him, young man?" he demanded.

"Yep."

The man with the trombone turned bright red. He reached into the case and picked up the trombone. As he lifted it through the air, George noticed what a peculiarly eye-catching quality the celestial object had. Its color and gloss had the effect on the eye that a blare of horns has on the ear. Heads began to turn toward it. In no time at all, everyone in the bar was watching the starchy man.

He seemed to pause a little, as if to make sure that he had the attention of his audience. Then he drew a deep, deep breath. He set the trumpet to his lips.

From the rear of the bar there burst out a jangling, skirling, shrieking, droning uproar. It was an amazing noise; a noise, George thought, to freeze the blood and make the hair stand upright. There must have been ultrasonics in it. It sounded like a thousand pigs being slaughtered with electric carving knives.

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Everyone in the bar had jumped at the sudden clamor, but the effect on the starchy man was remarkable. He jumped convulsively, as if he had sat on a damp tarantula. His eyes moved wildly; George thought he had turned pale.

He shouted, "They're after me!" He shouted it so loudly that it was perfectly audible even above the demoniac noise of the bagpipes. Then he grabbed up the trombone case, slammed the trombone in it, and ran out of the bar on his neat little patent leather feet.

The two bagpipers came out from the rear of the bar, still playing, and began to march toward the front. Apparently they had noticed nothing at all of the episode of the dark blue trumpet. The third man followed in the rear, beating on a small drum. From time to time he would put the drum sticks to his upper lip and seem to smell at them.

"Remarkable, isn't it?" Atkinson said to George over the racket. "Only bar I ever was in where they kept bagpipes in the rear to amuse the customers. The owner's Scottish, you know."

The instrumentalists reached the front of the bar. They stood there a moment skirling. Then they executed an about-face and marched slowly to the rear. They stood there while they finished their number. It was long, with lots of tootling. At last they laid their instruments aside, advanced to the bar, and sat down on three bar stools near the center. They ordered Irish whiskey.

"Wonder where he got that trumpet," Atkinson said thoughtfully, reverting to the man with the trombone case. "Stole it somewhere, I shouldn't be surprised."

"Too bad he didn't get to blow it," George answered. He ordered Atkinson and himself another drink.

"Oh, that!" Atkinson laughed shortly. "Nothing would have happened. It was just a fancy horn. You surely don't believe that wild yarn he told us? Why, I know what the real reason for all our troubles is!"

George sighed. He drew a design on the bar counter with his finger. "Another one," he said.

"Eh? What? Oh, you were talking to yourself. As I was saying, I know the real reason. Are you familiar with Tantrist magic and its principles?"

"Unhunh. No."

Atkinson frowned. "You almost sound as if you didn't want to hear about this," he observed. "But I was talking about Tantrist magic. One of its cardinal tenets, you know, is the magic power of certain syllables. For instance, if you persistently repeat Avalokiteshvara's name, you'll be assured of a happy rebirth in Heaven. Other sounds have a malign and destructive power. And so on."

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George looked about him. It was growing late; the bar was emptying. Except for himself and Atkinson, the pipers and the drummer, and a man around the corner of the bar from George, who had been sitting there silently against the wall all evening, the stools were empty. He looked at Atkinson again.

"About 1920," Atkinson was saying, " a lama in a remote little valley in Tibet —" George noticed that he pronounced the word in the austere fashion that makes it rhyme with gibbet — "got a terrific yen for one of the native girls. She was a very attractive girl by native standards, round and brown and plump and tight, like a little bird. The lama couldn't keep his eyes off her, and he didn't want to keep his hands off either. Unfortunately, he belonged to a lamistic order that was very strict about its rule of chastity. And besides that, he was really a religious man.

"He knew there was one circumstance, and one only, under which he could enjoy the girl without committing any sin. He decided to wait for it.

"A few months later, when the girl was out pasturing the buffalo, or feeding the silk worms, or something, she saw the lama coming running down the side of the hill toward her. He was in a terrific froth. When he got up to her, he made a certain request. 'No,' the girl answered, 'my mother told me I mustn't.' You see, she was a well-brought up girl."

George was looking at Atkinson and frowning hard. "Go on," he said.

"I *am* going on," Atkinson answered. "The lama told her to go home and ask her mother if it wasn't all right to do what the holy man told her. He said to hurry. So she did.

"When she came back the lama was sitting on the field in a disconsolate position. She told him it was all right, her mother had said to mind him. He shook his head. He said, 'The Dalai Lama has just died. I thought you and I could coöperate to reincarnate him. Under the circumstances, it wouldn't have been a sin. But now it's too late. Heaven has willed otherwise. The job has already been attended to.' And he pointed over to a corner of the field where two donkeys were copulating.

"The girl began to laugh. As I said, she was a well-brought up girl, but she couldn't help it. She laughed and laughed. She almost split her sides laughing. And the poor lama had to sit there listening while she laughed.

"You can't excuse him, but you can understand it. He'd wanted her so much, he'd thought he was going to get her, and then those donkeys — Well, he began to curse. He began to curse those terrible, malign Tantrist curses. He's been cursing ever since.

"Ever since 1920, he's been cursing. Once in a while he pauses for breath, and we think things are going to get better, but he always starts in again. He says those dreadful Tantrist syllables over and over, and they go bonging

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around the world like the notes of enormous brass bells ringing disaster. War and famine and destruction and revolution and death — all in the Tantrist syllables. He knows, of course, that he'll be punished by years and years of rebirths, the worst possible kind of karma, but he can't help it. He just goes on saying those terrible syllables."

George looked at him coldly. "*Two Kinds of Time,*" he said.

"Hunh?"

"I said, you read that story in a book about China called *Two Kinds of Time.* I read it myself. The donkeys, the lama, the girl — they're all in there. The only original part was what you said about the Tantrist curses, and you probably stole that from someplace else." George halted. After a moment he said passionately, "What's the *matter* with everybody tonight?"

"Oh, foozle," Atkinson replied lightly. "*Om mani padme hum.*" He picked up his hat and left the bar.

After a minute or so, the two pipers followed him. That left George, the silent man in the corner, and the instrumentalist who had played on the drum. George decided to have one more drink. Then he'd go home.

The silent man who was leaning against the wall began to speak.

"They were all wrong," he said.

George regarded him with nausea. He thought of leaving, but the bartender was already bringing his drink. He tried to call up enough force to say, "Shut up," but heart failed him. He drooped his head passively.

"Did you ever notice the stars scattered over the sky?" the man in the corner asked. He had a deep, rumbling voice.

"Milky Way?" George mumbled. Better hurry and get this over with.

"The Milky Way is one example," the stranger conceded. "Only one. There are millions of worlds within the millions of galaxies."

"Yeah."

"All those millions of burning worlds." He was silent for so long that George's hopes rose. Then he said, "They look pretty hot, don't they? But they're good to eat."

"Hunh?"

"The stars, like clams . . ."

"Beg your pardon," George enunciated. He finished his drink. "Misjudged you. You're original."

The man in the corner did not seem to have listened. "The worlds are like clams," he said rapidly, "and the skies at night present us with the glorious spectacle of a celestial clambake. They put them on the fire, and when they've been on the fire long enough, they open. They're getting this world of yours ready. When it's been on the fire a little longer, it'll open. Explode."

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George realized that that last drink had been one too many. He didn't believe what the man in the corner was saying. He wouldn't. But he couldn't help finding a dreadful sort of logic in it. "How'ju know this?" he asked feebly at last.

The man in the corner seemed to rise and billow. Before George's horrified and popping eyes, he grew larger and larger, like a balloon inflating. George drew back on the bar stool; he was afraid his face would be buried in the vast unnatural bulk.

"Because," said the inflating man in a high, twanging voice, "because I'm one of the clam-eaters!"

This horrid statement proved too much for George's wavering sobriety. He blinked. Then he slid backward off the bar stool and collapsed softly on the floor. His eyes closed.

The billowing form of the clam-eater tightened and condensed into that of a singularly handsome young man. He was dressed in winged sandals and a winged hat; from his naked body there came a soft golden light.

For a moment he stood over George, chuckling at the success of his joke. His handsome, jolly face was convulsed with mirth. Then, giving George a light, revivifying tap on the shoulder with the herald's wand he carried, the divine messenger left the bar.

TRENDS . . .

Henry Klinger, New York Associate Story Editor for Twentieth-Century-Fox, reports that the science fiction trend has caused a revision in Hollywood's classic plot-formula. The new story line runs:

Boy meets girl.
Boy looses girl.
Boy *builds* girl.

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It's a pleasure to offer another chronicle of that roving ballad-singer name of John, who seems just bound to meet up with queer people in queerer places. (He also encounters things.*) We find (as we hope you do, too) Manly Wade Wellman's reporting of John's adventures particularly attractive both for his faithful recording of one type of regional speech and for his rewarding explorations in American folklore. Mountainy talk is clear, to the point and often lyrically beautiful. And the places and things and people that mountainy folk judge best avoided should also be shunned by those who call themselves "educated." The people of the Smokies know that, along with her other treasures, America is also rich in terror; that a desrick (or shack) can be more horribly haunted than certain castles in Transylvania.*

The Desrick on Yandro

by MANLY WADE WELLMAN

THE FOLKS at the party clapped me such an encore, I sang that song.

The lady had stopped her car at the roadside when she saw my thumb out and my silver-strung guitar under my arm. Asked me my name, I told her John. Asked where I was headed, I told her nowhere special. Asked could I play that guitar, I played it as we rolled along. Then she invited me most kindly to her country house, to sing to her friends, and they'd be obliged, she said. And I went.

The people there were fired up with what they'd drunk, lots of ladies and men in costly clothes, and I had my bothers not getting drunk, too. But, shoo, they liked what I played and sang. Staying off wornout songs, I smote out what they'd never heard before — *Witch in the Wilderness* and *Rebel Soldier* and *Vandy, Vandy, I've Come to Court You.* When they clapped and hollered for more, I sang the Yandro song, like this:

I'll build me a desrick on Yandro's high hill,
Where the wild beasts can't reach me or hear my sad cry,
For he's gone, he's gone away, to stay a little while,
But he'll come back if he comes ten thousand miles.

Then they strung around and made me more welcome than any stranger could call for, and the hostess lady said I must stay to supper, and sleep

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there that night. But at that second, everybody sort of pulled away, and one man came up and sat down by me.

I'd been aware that, when first he came in, things stilled down, like with little boys when a big bully shows himself. He was built short and broad, his clothes were sporty, cut handsome and costly. His buckskin hair was combed across his head to baffle folks he wasn't getting bald. His round, pink face wasn't soft, and his big, smiling teeth reminded you there was a bony skull under that meat. His pale eyes, like two gravel bits, prodded me and made me remember I needed a haircut and a shine.

"You said Yandro, young man," said this fellow. He said it almost like a charge in court, with me the prisoner.

"Yes, sir. The song's mountainy, not too far from the Smokies. I heard it in a valley, and the highest peak over that valley's called Yandro. Now," I said, "I've had scholar-men argue me it really means yonder — yonder high hill. But the peak's called Yandro. Not a usual name."

"No, John." He smiled toothy and fierce. "Not a usual name. I'm like the peak. I'm called Yandro, too."

"How you, Mr. Yandro?" I said.

"I never heard of that peak or valley, nor, I imagine, did my father before me. But my grandfather — Joris Yandro — came from the Southern mountains. He was young, with small education, but lots of energy and ambition." Mr. Yandro swelled up inside his fancy clothes. "He went to New York, then Chicago. His fortunes prospered. His son — my father — and then I, we contrived to make them prosper still more."

"You're to be honored," I said, my politest; but I judged, with no reason to be sure, that he might not be too honorable about how he made his money, or used it. The way the others drew from him made me reckon he scared them, and that kind of folks scares worst where their money pockets located.

"I've done all right," he said, not caring who heard the brag. "I don't think anybody for a hundred miles around here can turn a deal or make a promise without clearing it with me. John, I own this part of the world."

Again he showed his teeth. "You're the first one ever to tell me about where my grandfather might have come from. Yandro's high hill, eh? How do we get there, John?"

I tried to think of the way from highway to side way, side way to trail, and so in and around and over. "I fear," I said, "I could show you better than I could tell you."

"All right, you'll show me," he said, with no notion I might want something different. "I can afford to make up my mind on a moment's notice like that. I'll call the airport and charter a plane. We leave now."

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"I asked John to stay tonight," said my hostess lady.

"We leave now," said Mr. Yandro, and she shut right up, and I saw how it was. Everybody was scared of him. Maybe they'd be pleasured if I took him out of there for a while.

"Get you plane," I said. "We leave now."

He meant that thing. Not many hours had died before the hired plane set us down at the airport between Asheville and Hendersonville. A taxi rode us into Hendersonville. Mr. Yandro woke up a used car man and bought a fair car from him. Then, on my guiding, Mr. Yandro took out in the dark for that part of the mountains I pointed out to him.

The sky stretched over us with no moon at all, only a many stars, like little stitches of blazing thread in a black quilt. For real light, only our headlamps — first on a paved road twining around one slope and over another and behind a third, then a gravel road and pretty good, then a dirt road and pretty bad.

"What a stinking country!" said Mr. Yandro as we chugged along a ridge as lean as a butcher knife.

I didn't say how I resented that word about a country that stoops to none for prettiness. "Maybe we ought to have waited till day," I said.

"I never wait," he sniffed. "Where's the town?"

"No town. Just the valley. Three-four hours away. We'll be there by midnight."

"Oh, God. Let's have some of that whiskey I brought." He reached for the glove compartment, but I shoved his hand away.

"Not if you're going to drive these mountain roads, Mr. Yandro."

"Then you drive a while, and I'll take a drink."

"I don't know how to drive a car, Mr. Yandro."

"Oh, God," he said again, and couldn't have scorned me more if I'd said I didn't know how to wash my face. "What is a desrick, exactly?"

"Only old-aged folks use the word any more. It's the kind of cabin they used to make, strong logs and a door you can bar, and loophole windows. So you could stand off Indians, maybe."

"Or the wild beasts can't reach you," he quoted, and snickered. "What wild beasts do they have up here in the Forgotten Latitudes?"

"Can't rightly say. A few bears, a wildcat or two. Used to be wolves, and a bounty for killing them. I'm not sure what else."

True enough, I wasn't sure about the tales I'd heard. Not anyway when Mr. Yandro was ready to sneer at them for foolishment.

Our narrow road climbed a great slant of rock one way, then doubled back to climb opposite, and became a double rut, with an empty, hell-scary drop of thousands of feet beside the car. Finally Mr. Yandro edged us

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into a sort of nick beside the road and shut off the power. He shook. Fear must have been a new feel in his bones.

"Want some of the whiskey, John?" he asked, and drank.

"Thank you, no. We walk from here, anyway. Beyond's the valley."

He grumped and mad-whispered, but out he got. I took a flashlight and my silver-strung guitar and led out. It was a downways walk, on a narrow trail where even mules would be nervous. And not quiet enough to be easy.

There were mountain night noises, like you never get used to, not even if you're born and raised there, and live and die there. Noises too soft and sneaky to be real murmuring voices. Noises like big flapping wings far off and then near. And, above and below the trail, noises like heavy soft paws keeping pace with you, sometimes two paws, sometimes four, sometimes many. They stay with you, noises like that, all the hours you grope along the night trail, all the way down to the valley so low, till you bless God for the little crumb of light that means a human home, and you ache and pray to get to that home, be it ever so humble, so you'll be safe in the light.

I've wondered since if Mr. Yandro's constant blubber and chatter was a string of curses or a string of prayers.

The light we saw was a pine-knot fire inside a little coop above the stream that giggled in the valley bottom. The door was open, and someone sat on the threshold.

"Is that a desrick?" panted and puffed Mr. Yandro.

"No, it's newer made. There's Miss Tully at the door, sitting up to think."

Miss Tully remembered me and welcomed us. She was eighty or ninety, without a tooth in her mouth to clamp her stone-bowl pipe, but she stood straight as a pine on the split-slab floor, and the firelight showed no gray in her tight-combed black hair. "Rest your hats," said Miss Tully. "So this stranger man's name is Mr. Yandro. Funny, you coming just now. You're looking for the desrick on Yandro, it's still right where it's been," and she pointed with her pipe stem off into the empty dark across the valley and up.

Inside, she gave us two chairs bottomed with juniper bark and sat on a stool next to the shelf with herbs in pots, and one or two old paper books, *The Long Lost Friend* and *Egyptian Secrets*, and *Big Albert* the one they say can't be thrown away or given away, only got rid of by burying with a funeral prayer, like a human corpse. "Funny," she said again, "you coming along as the seventy-five years are up."

We questioned, and she told us what we'd come to hear. "I was just a little pigtail girl back then," she said, "when Joris Yandro courted Polly Wiltse, the witch girl. Mr. Yandro, you favor your grandsire a right much. He wasn't as stout-built as you, and younger by years, when he left."

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Even the second time hearing it, I listened hard. It was like a many such tale at the start. Polly Wiltse was sure enough a witch, not just a study-witch like Miss Tully, and Polly Wiltse's beauty would melt the heart of nature and make a dumb man cry out, "Praise God Who made her!" But none dared court her save only Joris Yandro, who was handsome for a man like she was lovely for a girl. For it was his wish to get her to show him the gold on top of the mountain named for his folks, that only Polly Wiltse and her witching could find.

"Certain sure there's gold in these mountains," I answered Mr. Yandro's interrupting question. "Before ever the California rush started, folks mined and minted gold in these parts, the history-men say."

"Gold," he repeated, both respectful and greedy. "I was right to come."

Miss Tully said that Joris Yandro coaxed Polly Wiltse to bring down gold to him, and he carried it away and never came back. And Polly Wiltse pined and mourned like a sick bird, and on Yandro's top she built her desrick. She sang the song, the one I'd sung, it was part of a long spell and charm. Three quarters of a century would pass, seventy-five years, and her lover would come back.

"But he didn't," said Mr. Yandro. "My grandfather died up north."

"He sent his grandson, who favors him," said Miss Tully. "The song you heard brought you back at the right time." She thumbed tobacco into her pipe. "All the Yandro kin moved away, pure down scared of Polly Wiltse's singing."

"In her desrick, where the wild beasts can't reach her," quoted Mr. Yandro, and chuckled. "John says they have bears and wildcats up here." He expected her to say I was stretching it.

"Oh, there's other creatures, too. Scarce animals, like the Toller."

"The Toller?" he said.

"It's the hugest flying thing there is, I guess," said Miss Tully. "Its voice tolls like a bell, to tell other creatures their feed's near. And there's the Flat. It lies level with the ground, and not much higher. It can wrap you like a blanket." She lighted the pipe. "And the Bammat. Big, the Bammat is."

"The Behemoth, you mean," he suggested.

"No, the Behemoth's in the Bible. The Bammat's something hairy-like, with big ears and a long wiggly nose and twisty white teeth sticking out of its mouth —"

"Oh!" And Mr. Yandro trumpeted his laughter. "You've got some story about the Mammoth. Why, they've been extinct — dead and forgotten — for thousands of years."

"Not for so long, I've heard tell," she said, puffing.

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"Anyway," he went on arguing, "the Mammoth — the Bammat, as you call it — is of the elephant family. How would anything like that get up in the mountains?"

"Maybe folks hunted it there," said Miss Tully, "and maybe it stays there so folks will think it's dead and gone a thousand years. And there's the Behinder."

"And what," said Mr. Yandro, "might the Behinder look like?"

"Can't rightly say, Mr. Yandro. For it's always behind the man or woman it wants to grab. And there's the Skim — it kites through the air — and the Culverin, that can shoot pebbles with its mouth."

"And you believe all that?" sneered Mr. Yandro, the way he always sneered at everything, everywhere.

"Why else should I tell it?" she replied. "Well, sir, you're back where your kin used to live, in the valley where they named the mountain for them. I can let you two sleep on my front stoop tonight."

"I came to climb the mountain and see the desrick," said Mr. Yandro with that anxious hurry to him that I kept wondering about.

"You can't climb up there until it's light," she told him, and she made us two quilt pallets on the split-slab stoop.

I was tired and glad to stretch out, but Mr. Yandro grumbled, as if we were wasting time. At sunup next morning, Miss Tully fried us some side meat and slices of hominy grit porridge, and she fixed us a snack to carry, and a gourd to put water in. Mr. Yandro held out a ten dollar bill.

"No, I thank you," said Miss Tully. "I bade you stay, and I won't take money for that."

"Oh, everybody takes money from me," he snickered, and threw it on the door-sill at her feet. "Go on, it's yours."

Quick as a weasel, Miss Tully's hand grabbed a stick of stove wood.

"Lean down and take back that money-bill, Mister," she said.

He did as she told him. With the stick she pointed out across the stream that ran through the thickets below us, and up the height beyond. She acted as if there wasn't any trouble a second before.

"That's the Yandro Mountain," she said. "There, on the highest point, where it looks like the crown of a hat, thick with trees all the way up, stands the desrick built by Polly Wiltse. You look close, with the sun rising, and you can maybe make it out."

I looked hard. There for sure it was, far off and high up, and tiny, but I could see it. It looked a lean sort of a building.

"How about trails going up?" I asked her.

"There's trails up there, John, but nobody walks them."

"Now, now," said Mr. Yandro, "if there's a trail, somebody must walk it."

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"May be a lot in what you say, but I know nobody in this valley would set foot to such a trail. Not with what they say's up there."

He laughed at her, as I wouldn't have dared. "You mean the Bammat," he said. "And the Flat, and the Skim, and the Culverin."

"And the Toller," she added for him. "And the Behinder. Only a gone gump would go up there."

We headed away down to the waterside, and crossed on logs laid on top of rocks. On the far side a trail led along, and when the sun was an hour higher we were at the foot of Yandro's high hill, and a trail went up there, too.

We rested. Mr. Yandro needed rest worse than I did. Moving most of the night before, unused to walking and climbing, he had a gaunted look to his heavy face, and his clothes were sweated, and dust dulled out his shoes. But he grinned at me.

"So she's waited seventy-five years," he said, "and so I look like the man she's waiting for. And so there's gold up there. More gold than my grandfather could have carried off."

"You believe what you've been hearing," I said, and it was a mystery.

"John, a wise man knows when to believe the unusual, and how it will profit him. She's up there, waiting, and so is the gold."

"What when you find it?" I asked.

"My grandfather was able to go off and leave her. It sounds like a good example to me." He grinned wider and toothier. "I'll give you part of the gold."

"No thanks, Mr. Yandro."

"You don't want your pay? Why did you come here with me?"

"Just made up my mind on a moment's notice, like you."

He scowled then, but he looked up at the height. "How long will it take to climb, John?"

"Depends on how fast we climb, how well we keep up the pace."

"Then let's go," and he started up the trail.

It wasn't folks' feet had worn that trail. I saw a hoofmark.

"Deer," grunted Mr. Yandro; and I said, "Maybe."

We scrambled up on a rightward slant, then leftward. The trees marched in close around us, with branches above that filtered only soft green light. Something rustled, and we saw a brown, furry shape, big as a big cat, scuttling out of sight.

"Woodchuck," wheezed Mr. Yandro; again I said, "Maybe."

After an hour's working upward we rested, and after two hours more we rested again. Around 11 o'clock we reached an open space where clear light touched the middle, and there we sat on a log and ate the corn bread and

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smoked meat Miss Tully had fixed. Mr. Yandro mopped his face with a fancy handkerchief, and gobbled food for strength to glitter his eye at me. "What are you glooming about?" he said. "You look as if you'd call me a name if you weren't afraid."

"I've held my tongue," I said, "by way of manners, not fear. I'm just thinking about how and why we came so far and sudden to this place."

"You sang me a song, and I heard, and thought I'd come to where my people originated. Now I have a hunch about profit. That's enough for you."

"It's not just that gold story," I said. "You're more than rich enough."

"I'm going up there," said Mr. Yandro, "because, by God, that old hag down there said everybody's afraid to do it. And you said you'd go with me."

"I'll go right to the top with you," I said.

I forebore to say that something had come close and looked from among the trees behind him. It was big and broad-headed, with elephant ears to right and left, and white tusks like bannisters on a spiral staircase. But it was woolly-shaggy, like a buffalo bull. The Bammat. How could such a thing move so quiet-like?

He drank from his whiskey bottle, and on we climbed. We could hear those noises in the woods and brush, behind rocks and down little gulleys, as if the mountain side thronged with living things as thick as fleas on a possum dog and another sight sneakier. I didn't let on I was nervous.

"Why are you singing under your breath?" he grunted after a while.

"I'm not singing," I said. "I need my breath for climbing."

"I hear you!" he charged me, like a lawyer in court.

We'd stopped dead on the trail, and I heard it, too.

It was soft, almost like some half-remembered song in your mind. It was the Yandro song, all right:

Look away, look away, look away over Yandro,
Where them wild things are flyin'
From bough to bough, and a-mating with their mates,
So why not me with mine?

"That singing comes from up above us," I told Mr. Yandro.

"Then," he said, "we must be nearly at the top."

As we started climbing again, I could hear the noises to right and left in the woods, and then I realized they'd quieted down when we stopped. They moved when we moved, they waited when we waited. There were lots of them. Soft noises, but lots of them.

Which is why I myself, and probably Mr. Yandro too, didn't pause any more on the way up, even on a rocky stretch where we had to climb on all fours. It may have been an hour after noon when we came to the top.

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Right there was a circle-shaped clearing, with the trees thronged around it all the way except an open space toward the slope. Those trees had mist among and between them, quiet and fluffy, like spider webbing. And at the open space, on the lip of the way down, perched the desrick.

Old-aged was what it looked. It stood high and looked the higher, because it was built so narrow of unnotched logs, set four above four, hogpen fashion, as tall as a tall tobacco barn. The spaces between the logs were chinked shut with great masses and wads of clay. The steep-pitched roof was of shingles, cut long and narrow, so that they looked almost like thatch. There was one big door, made of an axe-chopped plank, and the hinges must have been inside, for I could see none. And one window, covered with what must have been rawhide scraped thin, with a glow of soft light coming through.

"That's it," puffed Mr. Yandro. "The desrick."

I looked at him then, and knew what most he wanted on this earth. He wanted to be boss. Money was just something to greaten him. His idea of greatness was bigness. He wanted to do all the talking, and have everybody else do the listening. He had his eyes hung on that desrick, and he licked his lips, like a cat over a dish of cream.

"Let's go in," he said.

"Not where I'm not invited," I told him, as flatly as anybody could ever tell him. "I said I'd come to the top. This is the top."

"Come with me," he said. "My name's Yandro. This mountain's name is Yandro. I can buy and sell every man, woman and child in this part of the country. If I say it's all right to go into a house, it's all right to go into a house."

He meant that thing. The world and everybody in it was just there to let him walk on. He took a step toward the desrick. Somebody hummed inside, not the words of the song, but the tune. Mr. Yandro snorted at me, to show how small he reckoned me because I held back, and he headed toward the big door.

"If she's there, she'll show me the gold," he said.

But I couldn't have moved from where I stood at the edge of the clearing. I was aware of a sort of closing in all around the edge, among the trees and brushy clumps. Not that the closing in could be seen, but there was a *gong-gong* farther off, the voice of the Toller norating to the other creatures their feed was near. And above the treetops sailed a round, flat thing, like a big plate being pitched high. A Skim. Then another Skim. And the blood inside my body was cold and solid as ice, and my voice turned to a handful of sand in my throat.

I knew, plain as paint, that if I tried to back up, to turn around even,

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my legs would fail and I'd fall down. With fingers like twigs with sleet stuck to them, I dragged around my guitar, to pluck at the silver strings, because silver is protection against evil.

But I didn't. For out of the bushes near me the Bammat stuck its broad woolly head, and it shook that head at me once, for silence. It looked me between the eyes, steadier than a beast should look at a man, and shook its head. I wasn't to make any noise. And I didn't. When the Bammat saw that I'd be quiet, it paid me no more mind, and I knew I wasn't to be included in what would happen then.

Mr. Yandro was knocking at the axe-chopped door. He waited, and knocked again. I heard him growl, something about how he wasn't used to waiting for people to answer his knock.

Inside, the humming had died out. After a moment, Mr. Yandro moved around to where the window was, and picked at the rawhide.

I could see, but he couldn't, as around from behind the corner of the desrick flowed something. It lay out on the ground like a broad, black, short-furred carpet rug. But it moved, humping and then flattening out, the way a measuring worm moves. It moved pretty fast, right toward Mr. Yandro from behind and to one side. The Toller said *gong-gong-gong*, from closer in.

"Anybody in there?" bawled Mr. Yandro. "Let me in!"

The crawling carpet brushed its edge against his foot. He looked down at it, and his eyes stuck out all of a sudden, like two door knobs. He knew what it was, and named it at the top of his voice.

"The Flat!"

Humping against him, it tried to wrap around his foot and leg. He gasped out something I'd never want written down for my last words, and pulled loose and ran, fast and straight, toward the edge of the clearing.

Gong-gong, said the Toller, and Mr. Yandro tried to slip along next to the trees. But, just ahead of him, the Culverin hoved itself half into sight on its many legs. It pointed its needle-shaped mouth and spit a pebble. I heard the pebble ring on Mr. Yandro's head. He staggered against a tree. And I saw what nobody's ever supposed to see.

The Behinder flung itself on his shoulders. Then I knew why nobody's supposed to see one. I wish I hadn't. To this day I can see it, as plain as a fence at noon, and forever I will be able to see it. But talking about it's another matter. Thank you, I won't try.

Then everything else was out — the Bammat, the Culverin, and all the others. They were hustling him across toward the desrick, and the door moved slowly and quietly open for him to come in.

As for me, I was out of their minds, and I hoped and prayed they wouldn't

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care if I just went on down the trail as fast as I could set one foot below the other.

Scrambling and scrambling down, without a noise to keep me company, I figured that I'd probably had my unguessed part in the whole thing. Seventy-five years had to pass, and then Mr. Yandro come there to the desrick. And it needed me, or somebody like me, to meet him and sing the song that would put it in his head and heart to come to where his granddaddy had courted Polly Wiltse, just as though it was his own whim.

No. No, of course, he wasn't the man who had made Polly Wiltse love him and then had left her. But he was the man's grandson, of the same blood and the same common, low-down, sorry nature that wanted money and power, and didn't care who he hurt so he could have both. And he looked like Joris Yandro. Polly Wiltse would recognize him.

I haven't studied much about what Polly Wiltse was like, welcoming him into the desrick on Yandro, after waiting inside for three quarters of a century. Anyway, I never heard of him following me down. Maybe he's been missed. But I'll lay you anything you name he's not been mourned.

Coming . . . *in our next issue (on sale in mid-June):*

Our next issue is distinguished by the return of Alfred Bester whose HOBSON'S CHOICE is a penetrating study of some basic — but hitherto ignored — aspects of time travel.

Alan Nelson, so favorably remembered for his CATTIVO and NARAPOIA, also returns with THE GUALCOPHONE, the kind of musical instrument that might be invented by a man terrified by sound.

And we are pleased to announce the first appearance here of Grahame Greene with PROOF POSITIVE, a brief study of a lecturer peculiarly ill-equipped to discourse on a future life. These are ably supported by a new adventure in Gavagan's Bar by de Camp and Pratt, and further stories by such people as Mildred Clingerman, August Derleth, Anthony Boucher and by an F&SF "first" by Garen Drussaï.

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Both scientists and fictionists have written in great and learned detail of the hazards attendant upon the launching of the first moon rocket. A careful scrutiny of such accounts, however, indicates that these gentlemen have failed to mention what may be the greatest peril of all. And that is for a couple of Hollywood press agents to take a hand in the proceedings. The least to be expected from such a development would be the presence of a starlet in the studio's conception of a Moon Maiden's costume. (Made of uranium gauze, of course.) And if one throws in the owner of a theater chain, an impractical scientist and yet another publicity expert the result would be one grand and gleeful blow-up, a chain reaction of hilarity that could, we're afraid, happen any day now.

The Moon Maiden

by HANNIBAL COONS

FEDERAL PICTURES
Hollywood, California

From RICHARD L. REED
Director of Publicity

October 11, 1951
Air Mail

Mr. George Seibert
Special Representative, Federal Pictures
Hotel Book-Cadillac
Detroit, Michigan

Dear George:

George, old boy, things are about to pick up. Have you ever been to the moon? For a real visit? If I were you, all I'd take would be light summer things, with maybe a tennis racket and a small keg of oxygen. Travel light, I always say, particularly if you intend to go straight up.

In other words, to business. You have perhaps heard that we are about due for a second round of pictures about the moon, flying saucers, little men from Mars, and other interstellar nonsense. As though people didn't have

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enough these days to scare the pants off them, we have lately been working on some pictures that are guaranteed to cause a general rush to the psycho ward. For once, when we run that line about not attending if you have a weak heart, we will mean it. These things will make the Frankenstein pictures seem like a day in the country.

But as usual, ours not to question why; ours but to get busy and sell some tickets. Personally, I would rather have the aspirin concession in the theaters concerned, but I fear that is impractical. The popcorn cartel would never allow it.

So I guess the only thing we can do is go along. And if we are going to help toot at all, we might as well toot loud.

Which is what I am working up to at the moment. Our own can of interplanetary corn is called *The Moon Maiden*, and it's about what you might expect. Same plot, of course. We spend a million dollars apiece to make these fool pictures, but we naturally can't spend too much time on the story. We get that done in about ten minutes, which leaves us more time to make the picture.

At least in this one the background will be new and fresh, as we personally built our own moon on which to shoot it. Also the costumes should prove appealing, since the designers have gone practically nuts on a Buck Rogers sports line, and without wasting one bit of material. I hope it's warm on the moon, as otherwise I fear the citizens will be chilly if they go there clad like our Moon Maidens.

But, as I was saying, to business. What we naturally have to do to sell this jet-propelled turkey is to tie it in somehow with the day's science news. The Air Force or any legitimate American scientist naturally wouldn't touch it with a ten-foot pole, and I was going crazy looking for a gimmick until I suddenly remembered Professor Waldo Zoom and that idiotic rocket to the moon he's been slaving away at for five years in a vast barn outside Pittsburgh. As you undoubtedly know, he's the German rocket expert who came over here after the war to induce somebody to give him a large sack of American dollars so that he could continue his lifework of actually getting to the moon.

The Air Force and the government, and most of our big companies, rapidly fobbed him off, and, as I remember, he finally got some retired corset manufacturer to back the deal. For a while there was a terrific hoorah about it in the papers. Interviews and pictures every hour on the hour. Then, as these things do, the fire sort of died down, and I didn't see one more word about it till the other day, when I saw a little item on page 14 saying that after five years of toil the professor was finally getting gassed up and expected to take off shortly.

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Which is where you come in. Because if anything is really ready to break over there, let us hasten to get a seat before the crowd gathers. If the professor is really getting the sandwiches aboard, he'll shortly be back in the news with a loud bang, and every publicity hack in this town will be after him to tie him in on their fool Buck Rogers pictures. And I intend to get him first. So go.

Here is the program: Speed to Pittsburgh, circle the town rapidly till you find the professor's barn, and somehow sell him the idea of taking along with him on his actual flight to the moon our breathtakingly beautiful Laurie Lane, who in a small uranium halter plays the role of head Moon Maiden in the picture. The idea being that there will naturally be several men along on the trip, but that Professor Zoom also wants to show the citizens on the moon a perfectly formed earth woman. And after a wide search he has chosen Laurie to take along. We are, of course, highly honored, and accept gladly. We will immediately fly lovely Laurie to Pittsburgh, and the story of her plans to go along, together with the pictures of her doing her last-minute shopping and of her inspecting the rocket daily, clad in the little plutonium sunsuit she wears in the picture, can hardly help but panic every paper and newsreel in the land. As publicity stunts go, it should be a whizzer.

So get her on the passenger list by any means necessary. Buy her a ticket at whatever price. If necessary, slip the professor a bundle of bank notes under the table. Actually, you'll no doubt be able to arrange the whole thing without spending a nickel. I can't imagine any man, even a scientist, demanding money to take Laurie Lane anywhere with him, even to the moon. And the old duck who backed the thing no doubt went into it largely for personal publicity, and we can certainly assure him of plenty of that. Incidentally, when you sell them the idea, naturally sell it straight. As far as they're to know, Laurie will definitely go any time they want to blow the whistle.

Which of course won't be exactly the case. As usual, I'm betting my all on my intense knowledge of human events. I've never seen one of these first-time deals yet that wasn't postponed at least forty times before they finally got ready to go. And after about the tenth postponement, by which time we will have ladled all the possible cream off the stunt, we will simply announce that due to the many postponements we have regretfully been forced to cancel Laurie's passage, due to necessary picture commitments. And that will be that. The professor can then take off and break his neck, if he so desires.

Isn't it a beauty? Go, boy; go. As though your pants were on fire.

Love,
Dick.

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RICHARD L. REED
FEDERAL PICTURES HOLLYWOOD CALIF

DICK, YOU KNOW PERFECTLY WELL THAT ANYWHERE NEAR A ROCKET TO THE MOON IS NO PLACE FOR ME. I WOULD UNDOUBTEDLY POKE THE WRONG TRIGGER, AND THE LAST SEEN OF OLD GEORGE WOULD BE A DIM GLOW HIGH ON THE WESTERN HORIZON. THANK YOU, BUT NO. I LIKE IT HERE. JUST PLAIN OLD HERE. GEORGE.

GEORGE SEIBERT
HOTEL BOOK-CADILLAC DETROIT MICH

GEORGE, THERE IS NO NEED FOR YOU TO GET ANYWHERE NEAR THAT FOOL ROCKET, AND YOU KNOW IT. IN FACT, I BEG OF YOU, DON'T. JUST SEE THE MAN, SELL YOUR MERCHANDISE, AND AWAY. A TEN-YEAR-OLD BOY COULD DO IT. DICK.

RICHARD L. REED
FEDERAL PICTURES HOLLYWOOD CALIF

TEN-YEAR-OLD BOYS UNDERSTAND ROCKETS MUCH BETTER THAN I DO. PERSONALLY, I HAVE ALWAYS CONSIDERED THE HORSE DANGEROUSLY SPEEDY. BUT, AFTER ALL, IT'S YOUR NICKEL. NOW WHERE DID I PUT MY GRAVITY-DEFIER BELT? OH, THERE IT IS . . . WHOOOOOOSH! GEORGE.

Hotel William Penn
Pittsburgh, Pa.

October 14, 1951
Air-Mail Special

Mr. Richard L. Reed
Director of Publicity, Federal Pictures
Hollywood, California

Dear Dick:

Well, you were right on one thing. Professor Zoom's rocket nursery is indeed near Pittsburgh. It's here all right, sitting on a knoll over behind one of the steel mills, like a tremendous misplaced cow barn. The only thing that you failed to remember was why.

After a morning spent in rapid reconnaissance, allow me to inform you of a few facts. The main one being that there is no more chance of carrying out this mad scheme than there is of my personally flying to the moon using only the simple breast stroke. Nobody connected with this project has the slightest interest in any snide publicity schemes. Your "retired corset man-

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ufacturer" happens to be in reality Mr. J. P. Mullrath, former head of the Great Northern Steel Company, and one of the richest and most respected industrialists in this country.

When he retired in 1946, he backed this rocket deal out of one of his many billfolds just to keep from being bored. He has already put around ten million dollars into it, which they say he hardly misses, so I can assure you that he has little interest in whether or not you purchase a ticket. Neither does he want or need any additional publicity. From what I can gather around town, he went into this thing with complete sincerity, just as Henry Ford went into that Peace Ship deal during World War I. Prominent men, just like common folks, can do some pretty odd things when they set their minds to it.

Anyway, with a few of the facts in, I first tried to telephone Mr. Mullrath at his vast South Hills place just outside of town. By talking rapidly I got as far as the third secretary from the end — a gentleman who seemed to be with the diplomatic service, and who informed me with some coolness that Mr. Mullrath was out of the city, and in any case couldn't possibly be interested in any publicity tie-ups, whatever they were, and thank you very much.

Professor Zoom out at the Project hung up on me almost as fast. I'd finally got through to him, but it was a hollow victory. "Moon Maidens? Vot iss?" he boomed. "Maidens on de *moon?* Dere are no *people* dere — only de *moon.* Oxcuse." And click.

That's a sample of why I tried to get Mullrath first. From what everybody says here, nobody yet has got anything resembling a sensible conversation out of the professor. He is a large burly man, with a rumpled beard and thick beer-bottle eye-glasses, and with even more than the customary German single-mindedness. All he does at any time is to sit in his disordered office in one corner of the huge bustling hangar and scribble figures on little drawings. He eats and sleeps there also. There is no way to catch him in town, because he never is in town. All he does at any time is think about rockets, and why he is not nuts I do not know. Everybody I have talked to thinks he is. But then of course a lot of people thought Fulton was nuts, and later they had some dandy Sunday afternoon outings on his steamboat.

The only difference being that you could at least get in to see Fulton; the professor is a little more incommunicado. The whole Project is surrounded by a solid wooden fence about ten feet high, with large KEEP OUT signs in abundance, and the only entrance is patrolled by private but thoroughly armed guards. All I can say is that for a free country there are getting to be an awful lot of places here you can't go.

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But at least there is one place where an ordinary citizen can still go. The depot. And let me say that I am ready.

As ever,
George.

P.S. I almost forgot to tell you the final straw. You may wonder why I didn't try a frontal attack through the Project's public relations office.

I started to. With due caution. And who do you think is in charge of publicity here? None other than Spec Withers, that little runt you fired back in 1939, after he got loaded on the Boston trip and threw all the *première* tickets out the windows of the bus. I can assure you that he would have little interest in helping you with anything.

GEORGE SEIBERT
HOTEL WILLIAM PENN
PITTSBURGH PA

WELL, SO I WAS WRONG. A TEN-YEAR-OLD BOY CAN'T HANDLE IT. I WILL HAVE TO HIRE AN ELEVEN-YEAR-OLD BOY. DICK.

GEORGE SEIBERT
HOTEL WILLIAM PENN
PITTSBURGH PA

OOPS, PLEASE DISREGARD LAST WIRE. UNCLE DICK HAS MADE A SLIGHT ERROR. DO NOT HARM A HAIR OF MR. MULLRATH'S LOVELY ROCKET. DO NOT GET NEAR IT EVEN WITH A POLISHING CLOTH. DO NOT SO MUCH AS ANSWER THE PHONE TILL YOU RECEIVE AIR MAIL SPECIAL LETTER NOW ON WAY. WHEW. DICK.

FEDERAL PICTURES
Hollywood, California

From RICHARD L. REED
Director of Publicity

October 16, 1951

Mr. George Seibert
Hotel William Penn
Pittsburgh, Pa.

Dear George:

George, move over and allow a friend to sit down. I have had a nasty blow. I try to pull a simple, wholesome little publicity stunt, and find myself blocked by atomic fate.

Do you know who that ridiculous J. P. Mullrath really is? A hurried investigation has just brought to light the crushing news that he is the very same J. P. Mullrath who has lately been buying up practically all the movie

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theaters on the Eastern seaboard. It seems that when he was a small raggle-tail boy back in Massillon, Ohio, he often did not possess the five cents necessary to attend the local nickelodeon, and so was frequently kicked out of the place on his threadbare little behind. By the age of nine he was thus good and sore, and vowed that someday he would *own* a movie theater. And after his retirement, when the rocket deal failed to use up all his spare change, he decided to have it.

He has accordingly been buying theaters briskly, and the last I heard he already had several dozen and was buying more as rapidly as he could get his fountain pen filled. As he buys each one he has a gold pass made for himself stating that he can attend at any time for free, and can even bring guests. They say the greatest enjoyment of his life is flashing his gold pass and glaring defiantly at his own doorman as he enters.

Actually, I don't know just how many theaters he now owns, but it is quite a few, and I don't think that I have to belabor the point that today we have no wish to enrage a man who for any reason whatever owns a large string of commodious movie houses. He may not need the money, but we do. And if we did anything to mess up that ten-million-dollar Roman candle of his, we would never again get a Federal Picture into any of his theaters, even if we paid admission for it. Which, things being what they are, could easily result in you and me being hanged.

At any rate, now that we know who is back of that fool rocket, the only thing we can possibly do is cancel. Why I wasn't told all this at first, I do not know; all I can say is that I have been given only one brain, and practically no assistants worth mentioning.

Unfortunately, I have already sent Laurie on by plane, and she should be checking in there at any time. Wait for her, thank her kindly, help her to repack her plutonium shorts, and start her home. And then you get out of there, too. And in the meantime, don't you touch that rocket.

Love,
Dick.

HOTEL WILLIAM PENN
Pittsburgh, Pa.

October 16, 1951

Mr. Richard L. Reed
Hollywood, California

Dear Dick:

Well, I can't imagine what your great crisis may be, but in any case I haven't time to wait for your letter. Because due to some nimble footwork

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I am suddenly in here just like a burglar, with a clear track straight to the money bin.

It happened not over an hour ago, with the speed of light. After I got your first wire I put on my hat and strolled over to the Project, thinking that maybe I could find some blunt instrument with which to slay myself. As I tottered weakly past the gate I noticed a bulletin board, with daily jottings of the types of citizens they might be in a mood to hire. And with nothing more in mind than to take one last look at worldly things, I staggered up to examine their needs.

And there it was. Under the expected ridiculous headings such as Physicists, Electronics Experts, Hydraulic Engineers and Moon Men, was a line, just as big as life, saying Public Relations Men — 1.

Well. Well, well, well. If only anybody but Spec Withers was in charge of their publicity department, I might —

And suddenly I had it. How simple! How extremely simple! Striding briskly up to the gate, I informed the nearest guard that I would like to see Mr. Spec Withers about the public relations post. And in a matter of seconds I was in Spec's ornate office, greeting him warmly, and telling him that I had finally quit myself, being unable to stand your boorish ways any longer. I was available for rocket work.

And after a suspicious glance or two, Spec began to warm up, and shortly we were just having a wonderful time telling each other what a really horrible person you are. Spec would think of some mean thing you had once done to him, and I would think of something even meaner you had once done to me. And so it went, one revolting recollection after another.

And in twenty minutes I was hired and given my blue badge affording me free access to rocketland.

My duties are to assist Spec in the preparations for handling the expected crush at the forthcoming take-off. It seems that they are really getting about ready to go, and Spec doesn't want anything untoward to happen as they near departure time. So he hired me.

And here's the plan. During the next day or two I will get well acquainted with Professor Zoom, following him closely from diagram to diagram, and, if possible assisting him as he makes the final adjustments inside the rocket itself. In this way I can find out his likes and dislikes, play upon them, and get a fine statement for our ads out of him.

And, in any case, now that I am the Assistant Public Relations Manager here, I will have no trouble at all sneaking Laurie in when she gets here, say around three in the morning, and getting all the pictures you could want of her actually at the controls of the world's only real interplanetary rocket. Tomorrow they plan to wheel the thing out and set it up in the

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launching tower, and the professor is to start the actual tests of the tremendous rocket engines. By tomorrow night, when Laurie gets here, everything should be all ready to go. Which should make for some thrillingly authentic pictures. And there's no danger whatever. Spec tells me the professor has a secret safety switch on the dashboard somewhere, which makes it impossible for the thing to take off accidentally. He is supposed to have this ship perfectly worked out.

Personally, if you want my honest opinion, I don't think it's ever going to take off at all. I may not be widely known in scientific circles, but I still know a rocket that can get to the moon when I see one, and this pile of iron will just never make it. With full power on, it might slide up the road as far as Cleveland, but that would be all. It will never get to the moon, and that's that.

But that, of course, is no concern of ours. The point is, that with my blue badge giving me full access to the premises, I am now in business. Come to think of it, I don't have to go to any extra trouble at all to get any statements you might want from the professor, Mullrath, or anyone else around here. In my official capacity I can certainly issue any small publicity statement of this sort, signing anyone's name at random. What would you like anyone to say? Even when they find out what is going on, all they can do is fire me. And by that time *The Moon Maiden* will be off to a zippy start, and I will merely take my paste pot and go, returning to Federal's festive board.

Speaking of beauties, how do you like that one?

And now you will have to pardon me. The noon hour is over, and I have to hasten back to see if the water is boiling yet in my rocket. I may grow real fond of this ship even if it *doesn't* ever leave the ground.

Don't give this end another thought. I am beginning to warm to my work.

Relieved regards,
George.

GEORGE SEIBERT
HOTEL WILLIAM PENN
PITTSBURGH PA

GEORGE, GET AWAY FROM THAT THING. THIS INSTANT. AND THE MINUTE LAURIE ARRIVES, BOTH OF YOU GET OUT OF THERE. IF YOU DID ANYTHING TO THAT FOOL ROCKET, AFTER FIVE YEARS' WORK AND TEN MILLION DOLLARS SPENT ON IT, THE NEXT ROCKET TO THE MOON WOULD TAKE OFF WITH YOU AND ME TIED TO THE TAIL. GET OUT OF THERE. BEFORE SOMETHING HAPPENS. DICK.

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RICHARD L. REED
FEDERAL PICTURES HOLLYWOOD
CALIF

OH, QUIT WORRYING. JUST LEAVE EVERYTHING TO ME. INCIDENTALLY, WHY AM I DOING THIS IGNOMINIOUS PLEADING? I, SIR, AM GAINFULLY EMPLOYED BY THE PITTSBURGH MOON ROCKET PROJECT, AND I HAVE MY BLUE BADGE TO PROVE IT. AWAY, SIR, WE'RE BUSY. GEORGE.

SPEC WITHERS
PITTSBURGH MOON ROCKET PROJECT
PITTSBURGH PA

SPEC WITHERS, YOU'RE JUST AS DUMB AS YOU EVER WERE. GEORGE IS JUST PULLING YOUR STUPID LEG. ALL HE'S DOING IS RUNNING A LITTLE PUBLICITY STUNT FOR ME WHICH HAS GONE SO SOUR THAT I'M CALLING IT OFF. SO TAKE HIS BLASTED BADGE AWAY FROM HIM, AND KICK HIM OUT THE GATE. IF YOU BREAK ANY VITAL BONES IN THE PROCESS I'LL SEND YOU FIFTY DOLLARS. BUT AT LEAST DON'T BE A SCHNOOK ANY LONGER. RICHARD L. REED.

RICHARD L. REED
FEDERAL PICTURES HOLLYWOOD
CALIF

WELL, HOW MEAN CAN YOU GET? GEORGE FINALLY GETS A DECENT JOB, AND YOU HUNT HIM DOWN AND TRY TO GET HIM FIRED. INDEED NOT. YOU JUST ROLL YOUR HOOP, REED, AND WE'LL ROLL OURS. WE'RE GETTING ALONG JUST FINE. SPEC WITHERS.

MOON ROCKET BLOWS UP

Pittsburgh, Pa., October 19 (AP) — Shortly after three o'clock this morning, with an earth-shaking roar, the moon rocket which has been under construction here for the past five years suddenly exploded into nothingness. The rocket itself was totally destroyed, but fortunately, due to the late hour, no one was injured. But to Professor Waldo Zoom, builder of the rocket, and Mr. J. P. Mullrath, retired Pittsburgh industrialist and backer of the project, it was a heartbreaking loss. All that is known so far is that just prior to the explosion George Seibert, newly hired assistant public relations head of the project, had been inside the huge rocket taking pictures of screen star Laurie Lane, as part of a publicity stunt for the Federal Pictures production, The Moon Maiden. Shortly afterward, the giant rocket exploded . . .

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RICHARD L. REED
FEDERAL PICTURES HOLLYWOOD
CALIF

DICK, I BEG OF YOU, DO NOT OPEN THE MORNING PAPERS TILL YOU GET AIR MAIL SPECIAL LETTER NOW ON WAY. EVERYTHING HERE IS REALLY JUST PEACHY KEEN. AS YOU WILL SHORTLY SEE. GEORGE.

GEORGE SEIBERT
HOTEL WILLIAM PENN
PITTSBURGH PA

SON, I HOPE YOU'RE RIGHT. BECAUSE OTHERWISE I WILL PROBABLY BEAT YOU TO DEATH WITH A TWO-BY-FOUR. RICHARD L. REED.

Hotel William Penn
Pittsburgh, Pa.

October 18, 1951
Air-Mail Special

Mr. Richard L. Reed
Director of Publicity, Federal Pictures
Hollywood, California

Dear Dick:

Well, it's been a busy day. So busy that it's now five thirty in the morning, and technically I guess it's tomorrow. But I have never considered a new day to be started until I have personally gone to bed and got up, and so by Seibert time it is still yesterday. In other words, today.

But you are no doubt in a hurry to know the salient facts, so I will dispense with further items of personal nature. And get right at it.

Today's chain reaction — you will have to pardon me if I occasionally lapse into the scientific idiom — began first thing this morning when I arrived at my rocket office shortly after nine. I found Mr. Spec Withers snorting about the premises like an enraged midget, snapping and snarling at a letter he held in his hand. Nimble pursuit disclosed that it was a polite note from Mr. J. P. Mullrath, asking if there was any possibility that the publicity plans for the forthcoming rocket take-off could be handled in such a way as to provide larger attendance at his various movie theaters.

"Help a lousy movie theater, eh?" roared Spec. "I wouldn't spit in Hollywood's eye if they were dying of thirst."

Well, if Spec was going to take this brooding attitude, the only thing to do was to proceed on my own. If Mr. Mullrath, our employer, was in a mood for publicity tie-ups, I saw no reason why he shouldn't have them.

I was, in fact, halfway to his house in South Hills, in a speeding taxi, when I suddenly began to realize that there might be more here than met

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the eye. Why should a man of Mr. Mullrath's wealth, to whom movie theaters were only playthings suddenly be so anxious to boost attendance?

And taking out an old envelope and a stray pencil, bracing myself on the turns, I began to figure. At first idly, and then with growing interest. Modern movie theaters, if you buy them outright, cost anywhere from fifty thousand to maybe a couple of million each. If Mr. Mullrath had bought several dozen, that added up to quite a piece of change. Could it be that Mr. Mullrath was getting a little strapped for cash? It was worth a try.

And then I was being ushered in to see him — a wonderfully robust old citizen in gray tweed golf knickers. I have always liked golf knickers myself, and I liked Mr. Mullrath instantly.

"Mr. Mullrath," I said, "I am Mr. George Seibert, confidential representative of Federal Pictures, and in line with our policy of close co-operation with the exhibitor, we have thought that possibly you might be feeling the financial strain of getting all your new theaters running smoothly. And we wondered if there was anything that we could do to help."

"Mr. Seibert," he said, "you are just the man I want to see."

And he proceeded to tell me all. When he first started the rocket thing, the professor had assured him that the whole deal would cost no more than a million. Practically nothing, you might say.

So he had happily started buying his theaters. Some days he had bought several. "I thought at the time," he said, "that many of those theater owners seemed strangely anxious to sell; literally dozens of them had to take long trips for their wife's health."

Mr. Mullrath has since had a somewhat rude awakening, the 1946 box-office figures being a little at variance with the 1951 figures.

And, simultaneously, the rocket of course had used up not one million, but ten. Every other day the professor has needed more money.

And by now, with everything going out and not as much as expected coming in, Mr. Mullrath's money well was indeed running a little dry.

"Are you going to get back anything at all out of the rocket?" I asked, casting about for possibilities. I thought that possibly he had made some endorsement tie-ups with Blatz Oxygen, or something, the way they do at the Indianapolis Speedway.

"Not a nickel," said Mr. Mullrath sadly. "Not a nickel. I am completely sick of that rocket by now, and there is no way to get back a nickel of the money I have poured into it, because the insurance covers it only up to take-off time."

It seems that the insurance company, playing the percentage to the hilt as usual, had insured the monster only during the construction period. The whole history of these first-time deals is that they do get built, they

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do take off, but flop dismally about two blocks down the road. The insurance lads therefore, and for a thumping premium, had consented to sell Mr. Mullrath insurance only till the whistle blew; once the thing was one inch off the ground, their responsibility was over, and good luck to all.

"Well," I said. "Well, well, well." And I somewhat hurriedly took my departure.

On the way back to the rocket works, I called the hotel, and Laurie had just arrived. "Do not stir from your room," I told her. "See that your smallest size picture costume is neatly pressed, and await the word."

By now it was early afternoon, and the great gleaming rocket had been trundled out and raised erect inside the tremendous launching tower.

Around the whole works the world's largest tarpaulin had been thrown up, and all over the place was a rash of new signs: *NO SMOKING. NO OPEN FLAMES. NO BREATHING. . . .*

Hurrying past this spectacle, I busied myself during the rest of the day in various ways, including having a most informative chat with the professor.

At any rate, shortly before three I aroused Laurie, had her don her best bits of uranium gauze, and with a long cloak tossed about her, we headed for rocketland. On the way we picked up a hired photographer.

First we took a series of pictures inside the rocket, with Laurie harmlessly twirling various of the dials. I thought that if the rest of the plan failed to come off we would at least have some pictures. Nothing untoward happened, as I knew it wouldn't. But as we descended the wooden stairs to the ground, I made a startling discovery. "My goodness," I said, "I have forgotten my hat." And I hastened back into the rocket to get it, pausing momentarily in front of the great electronic brain.

Flipping the ON switch, I hurridly gave it a few minor navigational problems. If we were ten miles from Saturn, with a thirty-mile-an-hour wind off Waikiki, what course should we steer to the moon if we also had to stop by Fort Worth? Also, what did it intend to do if it got to the moon and there was a sign there saying: NO U TURN? And starting out from Pittsburgh, did it have in mind taking the Pennsylvania Turnpike, or going up through Beaver Falls?

I did not, however, wait for the answers. Speeding down the stairs, I rejoined Laurie and the photographer and hastened them away from there.

We were hardly a hundred feet away when the rocket's great electronic brain, after pondering my problems, went utterly and completely nuts. Bells started ringing, the tail fins started flapping, the auxiliary steering rockets commenced going off in salvo, all sorts of warning horns began blowing, there was a growing series of internal explosions, and suddenly the entire rocket, giving up the struggle, turned a brilliant pink,

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and blew itself to smithereens. It was a magnificent and devastating show.

And though we did our best to get away, the arriving guards, reporters and news photographers cornered us, and forced from my stunned lips the whole lurid story. Of how I was merely taking a few publicity pictures of Moon Maiden Laurie Lane, and the flash bulbs must have set off some ghastly chain reaction. Oh, heavens to Betsy!

Which is why every newspaper in this country, from the late morning editions on, will be loaded to the gunwales with publicity about *The Moon Maiden*. For days. Because if there is anything the average city editor loves it is a big publicity stunt he thinks has gone wrong.

And the way the reporters and photographers are clustering around Laurie and the wreckage at the moment, I can assure you that in great glee they will play this thing up until they make it one of the biggest publicity successes of all time.

And, as I say, everyone here is just as happy as a lark. First, with most of his ten million back, Mr. Mullrath can now solidify his theater holdings and not lose his socks. Not over ten minutes ago he wrung my hand and said that if we ever wanted a picture backed just call upon him.

And even the insurance company has no real kick coming. The fool project has dragged on for so many years that Mullrath has paid in almost as much in premiums as he will get back.

Which leaves only the professor. You are perhaps thinking that it is a shame to ruin five years of a man's lifework. Well, that is not exactly the case, as I discovered this afternoon. During the five years that the professor has been slaving away here it seems that rocket science in general has gone forward at a sizzling pace, and when I went in to see the professor this afternoon, to learn a few things about the rocket racket, I found him weeping bitterly. It seems that his beloved rocket, now that it was done, was already hopelessly old-fashioned, and he had no more real chance of getting to the moon in it than he had of getting to the moon in a pickup truck. But now that it was done he would have to try to take off, or the whole world would laugh him out of existence.

"If I could joost build it again," moaned the professor.

Well, now he can. Nobody blames him for anything, so he can now get a little sleep and some new backing, and build himself a nice new rocket.

I knew that that one he had would never make it. Any fool could see that that was good riddance.

In fact, I'm really left with only one question. Should I, or should I not, ask Spec for my three days' pay?

As ever,
George.

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It is always very pleasant to encounter an old fantasy familiar in new haunts. Dr. Dance (he's an M.D. and this is his first story) presents one of the oldest villains of man's imagination in an entirely new setting, that of a modern hospital. While such surroundings are perhaps more antiseptic than those we usually ascribe to this being, the reasons advanced for its existence there are frighteningly plausible. As an added fillip, Dr. Dance gives his story a nice detectival twist. How soon will you deduce the identity of the brother?

The Brothers

by CLIFTON DANCE

"HERE he is, Doc." Reardon's heavy cop-voice sounded clearly relieved to be turning the prisoner over.

The sleep-narrowed eyes of the intern looked at what had been brought him at 3 A.M. Not usually much at that hour on the psycho service. Occasional would-be suiciders, paraphrenic drunks, senile wanderers. Usually got a fair night's sleep. Not up suturing all night like the surgery boys, or catching premies on OB.

"What did he do?" he asked the cop.

"Well, he claims he lives in the Ridgewood Cemetery over on Andrews Avenue. He was just inside the fence, sitting on a grave, when we found him."

The intern gazed at him solemnly. "Did you check with the caretaker?"

"Yeah, and he doesn't know anything about him."

The intern addressed the prisoner. "What's your name?"

"Joseph Walder."

"How old are you?"

"I was fifty-six."

Was! The intern turned the word over in his mind, then decided it was too early in the morning to quibble about grammar.

"Where do you live?"

"I dwell in the Ridgewood Cemetery."

The intern, Brandt, absorbed this statement silently. He shifted slightly on his stool and leaned forward, grasping the man's arm, feeling the thin

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sticklike bones under the coat sleeve. His voice was young, sincere, and as authoritative as he could make it.

"Look here, Joseph. You say you live in the Ridgewood Cemetery. The officers here have checked with the caretaker and he doesn't know you. How do you explain that?"

"They don't understand." There was a rusty, throaty quality to his voice.

"What do you do in the Ridgewood Cemetery?"

The dry looking lips separated and the yellow teeth came slowly into view. It wasn't quite a grin. The man said nothing.

The intern shifted slightly again, uneasily, and looked at the cops and then back to the prisoner.

"Do you have any relatives we could call to come and take you home?"

The man looked straight at him with those curiously wide blank eyes, the pupils so dilated there was hardly any iris to be seen.

"You could not call them," he said.

Brandt tried once more.

"Where else do you live, besides the cemetery?"

The man barely moved his shoulders, causing a filmy fall of dust particles.

Brandt closed his eyes for a moment as though trying to think of some way out of the thing, some way to solve the problem quickly and get back to bed.

"Mrs. Jamison," he called to the nurse. "Do we have a bed in a closed ward?"

Mrs. Jamison looked at a big card on the desk before her.

"H 12," she said.

"Fine," Brandt said. "We'll put you up for the night, Joseph, and in the morning perhaps we can straighten this out."

Walder walked into the ward and undressed when they told him to. He said nothing to their comments about his clothes and the filth. They were good clothes. Digging is hard work and even the best material will wear. And the dirt — good clean earth. They didn't understand. He'd never expected them to. He'd been a fool back there with the police and the doctor. He should never have told them those things.

But it had been such an awful surprise. He hadn't noticed the police until they were right next to him. Then they spoke so fast he couldn't keep up; years of habit had slowed his thought processes to the somber pace of Ridgewood. He was so frantic to get away that he told them the first thing he thought of and that happened to be the truth.

He should have stayed deeper. But like all the brothers in Ridgewood,

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except perhaps old Phidias, he was hoping to find a way to fare in the living world. He must be stupid, stupid as some of the higher brothers had told him he was, for look what had happened to him. A wave of sheer hopelessness and futility swept over him. He must get out of here and back to Ridgewood. He must! He must! The idea pushed everything else out of his mind and he numbly let the orderlies guide him into the white tiled room. They stood him in the shower and he felt the strange warm water running all over him, over his long cold flesh. It stirred him oddly, as though his body was remembering things of long ago. Things of warmth. Then they put him between smooth white sheets, smelling of the iron, and put sideboards on the bed. For hours he lay there, sensing the aliens living all around him, feeling their constant pumping vibrations, louder and louder, almost overwhelming him; making him want to jump up and try the heavy mesh over the window, shake it and see if he could get out; making him want to pull at the wire door and call the orderly to let him out, out of the hospital, back to where he belonged.

Dr. Brandt, the intern, came in early so he could complete his notes on the new admission and do a physical before rounds. The patient was apparently still delusional this morning: Ridgewood Cemetery was it? May be some kind of addiction, cerebral arteriosclerosis, or paresis. It could be lots of things. But which one? Be glad when this service was over, sleep or no sleep. These guys gave him the creeps. Lives in a cemetery! Now a gall bladder that doesn't empty can be cut out. But what can you cut out of a guy who thinks he lives in a cemetery?

Like an immense icicle it flew into Walder's mind, pure cold slender thought. It happened while the doctor was tapping on his back, and startled Walder so that he stopped breathing and the doctor had to tell him rather impatiently to start up again. It seemed to come from one of the floors above, high up and to the left. "*Only one all night and he's full of radioactive iodine. Thyrogenic carcinoma is bitter enough, Satan knows, without loading it with halogenated gamma rays. To hell with . . .*" It mumbled off till he could no longer perceive it. Hope surged up in him like a palpable substance. A brother! A brother! Somewhere up there in the hospital itself. He had but to contact him and he would get him out of here and find him a place in this world. This seemed to be a brother of tremendous brilliance and force; his thoughts, strong and clear, filled Walder's system to its fullest resonance, sounding like a bell when you're right in the bell tower, all pervasive, overwhelmingly powerful. If Walder only had a fraction of that power he could summon the brother himself. But no, he knew he could never

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make himself heard, particularly now, weak and confused as he was. Unlike some of the more powerful brothers who could use the telepathic voice by intention, it was in him, like in most, usually subliminal, becoming apparent only in periods of high sensual excitement. He was really very poor telepathically, though sometimes, he reflected, that had proved an advantage; he recalled the time he had found the fat one in the new Sherrington plot . . . he'd had more than he wanted by the time his radiations were strong enough to bring the rest of them scuttering down upon his find.

But a brother! A brother right here in the hospital . . .

Brandt went methodically over the patient. Chest clear to percussion and auscultation. Definite bradycardia and the cardiac sounds had a hesitant, tired quality. They somehow made him think of the word "dusty," though he'd never heard that term used in physical diagnosis. Words, words — he was getting as balmy as the psych staff. Wished he was back on the path service, much as he hated the fragrances of the post room. At least there you had something concrete to work with. What was it old Mayer, the pathology chief, used to say? Something about necromancy and alchemy being required courses for all psychiatrists. Well, that Fuchs, the psych chief, was a necromancer if there ever was one. Seemed to know what you were thinking before you opened your mouth. And from one sentence he could deduce the state of your past relations with your sisters. Like to see what he would make of this old bird! Brandt did a brief neurological and went back to the nurses' station to write up Walder. Except for the bradycardia, the halitosis, and the mydriasis the physical exam was essentially normal. Emaciated of course. That odor though, worse than a lung abscess. Teeth seemed OK. Have to rule out that lung abscess as well as an esophageal diverticulum. Better have a chest ray. He wrote the order on the chart and glanced through the nurses' notes. Nothing unusual. Wouldn't eat his breakfast. Well, lots of them won't eat at first. This guy didn't seem to be the nervous type though. He'd be all right.

Who could it be? A patient? An orderly? A doctor? Some visitor? At the last thought Walder almost panicked. He must get to him before he got away! He was in a fever of anxiety until he perceived some low, almost unintelligible mumblings from about the same place. Seemed to be about hobnails and livers and he could make no sense of it at all. He watched everyone the orderly let through the locked wire door, and tried to make out those passing in the hall beyond. He must let the brother know he was here. For the brother might be anyone — that orderly, that student, that doctor across the ward! These worldly brothers were ingenious beyond be-

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lief; they had to be. Their disguises could probably fool him easily. His only chance was to reveal himself enough to have the brother recognize him. But he must remember not to reveal too much. His head ached with all this thinking. Why, oh why did he ever leave Ridgewood?

If he'd only been content to stay deep, like old Phidias! But no, he'd thought that by observing the living ones he could discover a way to fare in their world. It was with this in mind that he'd left the older burial grounds in the center of Ridgewood and made his way to the edge. He'd seen others leave and knew of their successes. Like that Matthew Shayne. Was it seventeen years ago he'd left? Now look at him! Driving in as bold as brass with the caskets and lowering them into the ground and looking mournful in his morning coat. And how the brothers laughed at the rubbish Shayne stuffed the coffins with, and how they cursed him for leaving nothing but chitterlings for them. Still, he always remembered to leave those, and there was never a trace of formalin about them, so the brothers were grateful. Oh, it was a sorry lot to be at the bottom of the order, forced to eke out an existence on the wrecks morticians left. If only Walder had been a little cleverer perhaps he, too, could have found a way like Brother Matthew. Perhaps he would yet with the help of this brother he'd . . . "*Fool, Fool! Three months you've been here and you can't recognize a fibroblast! See those giant cells, and the collagenous fibers? Epulis, epulis, epulides! Idiot residents, idiot* . . ." The brother was angry. His thoughts clanged through Walder's system, driving out everything else. Then gradually they sank and disappeared.

Martin, the resident on the closed wards, worked his way around the hall, hearing the interns' work-ups of the cases, dictating progress notes and orders. He stopped by Brandt's new admission and looked at him. It's strange how often the first impression one gets is right. This patient just lay there, not even looking at him. Waxen flexibility, psychomotor retardation, masklike facies . . . the terms rolled across Martin's mind, calling up other phrases, other symptoms, other ideas — all leading to a diagnosis. A schiz, he thought, this one will turn out to be a catatonic schiz.

"All right, Brandt," he said, and listened attentively to the admission note, the history and physical.

"What do you think it is, Brandt?"

"Well, sir, fifty-six is a little early for senile dementia, but he sure looks a lot older."

He certainly does, thought Martin, and picked up one of the patient's hands. The nails were dirty, coarse and rough like a laborer's.

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"Is that all you've got to say?"

"Well, yes sir, I guess I'd make that number one and rule out paresis."

"You would, eh?" It was hard to tell from Martin's voice what he thought of the diagnosis. He spoke to the patient. What's your name? Where are you? What year is this? What state is this? He was satisfied with the answers, which were given in an even, throaty voice with no hesitation.

"I'd say he was fairly well oriented, Brandt! One of the most frequent characteristics of senility is disorientation. Now we'll try him a little further and see what we get."

"Where were you born?"

"Detroit."

"When?"

"1807."

1807! Martin stopped and thought about it. This was 1952. He moved around to where he could see the patient's face better.

"And how old are you?"

"I was fifty-six."

"Probably, but how old are you now?"

"One doesn't get any older after that happens."

"What happens?"

What happens? Walder repeated the question inanely to himself. How could he tell this one what it was like? He musn't tell him. He'd told enough already for a brother to recognize him. Perhaps he was toying with him; a joke like they sometimes played on him in Ridgewood, as when Shayne had lain down in a coffin and they had led him to believe Shayne was a new one for him.

"I do not think you would understand."

Martin didn't like that too well. He looked at Brandt and then back at the patient.

"Where do you live?"

"Ridgewood Cemetery."

"Now, listen —" he glanced at the chart, "Mr. Walder. This is a hospital. We don't have time to joke. We know you don't live in the cemetery so why don't you tell us where you do live? We're your friends, we want to help you, get you home again."

The sepulchral voice was so faint Martin had to strain to hear it. "You do not understand. You could not understand."

It was the wrong thing to say. Martin just looked at the patient and moved on to the next bed.

"Better get a dental refer on him, Brandt."

"His teeth seem OK, sir. I thought a chest plate might show something."

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"Lungs, teeth . . . something's sure rotten. Get it cleaned up so the rest of these patients can breathe."

"Yes sir," Wesson said.

Why didn't the brother come? Walder caught his thoughts at odd times during the day, sometimes nearer, sometimes further. Odd, jumbled words and phrases that meant nothing to Walder. Strange ideas of little colored circles and irregular boxes with dots and lines in them and sometimes wiggling little things. There were mutterings of leukemoid and metamyelocyte, safranin, myxomas, Anitschow nuclei and chromatolysis. All sorts of strange stuff that sounded at times like a foreign language. Then late in the afternoon the radiations suddenly came in even louder than in the morning. "*Beautiful, beautiful. We just cut out this little infarct and we have at least 300 grams of delicious myocardium left.*" He must be quite excited to have such volume! After that Walder heard no more till morning. Apparently the brother left the hospital at night, so he wasn't a patient. It narrowed down to an orderly, doctor, or student. Judging from the day's reception he wandered all over the building, but spent most of the time upstairs someplace.

A brother of such power would be a valuable ally. He must be high in the empire. He could certainly think of a place for Walder in this world. The hardest part always was leaving the cemetery. Now that Walder had done that they would surely recognize his worth and find him a place. Never had any brother returned to the cemetery. Walder thought of the various positions he might aspire to. There was the mortuary of course, and hadn't Brother Malachy found an excellent place as a morgue attendant? Wonderful stories had come back from a brother who was with a Graves Registration Unit, actually working for the government. "Working" he called it! Walder meditated happily for a moment on such a future. Then the driving hunger within him called him back. The brother must find him soon or it would be too late. He might perish for lack of sustenance! Or he might even be exposed for what he was! There were dreadful tales of what was done to brothers who were found out by the living ones.

Without the consoling intrusions of the brother's thoughts the nights became horrible wastelands of hopelessness and despair. Slowly, ever slowly, the hours passed by, measured loudly, constantly by that living pumping around him. Nowhere any silence, any peace, any food, only the violent, harsh rhythms of the living. Perhaps the old man in the corner . . . he seemed only partially alive and he pumped and beat more slowly, more weakly than the rest. Part of the man seemed still and quiet and almost ready. Soon perhaps . . . The hunger was burning within Walder. He

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could feel himself withering, dying out. If only he had heeded the others and stayed deeper. Now, locked in this place of the living, he would starve and be lost forever — for who had ever risen twice!

Two days later Walder's clinical story was the same. He hadn't eaten anything since admission and he looked it. Brandt took him off the house diet list and ordered a select diet. The dietitian called him up at noon. You could order a select diet easily enough, but how could you make the patient select it? Brandt called Martin and Martin called the chief resident.

"Why won't you eat, old man?" Rawlings was a clubby type, but one of the smartest residents ever to hit the institution.

"I don't care for that stuff."

"What would you like?" asked Rawlings.

Walder looked at him, estimated him, weighed his possibilities, then knew he was not the one.

He shook his head.

"Tube feed him," said Rawlings. He took the chart and glanced through it. "Tarry stools, eh. You take any pills, old man? No." Rawlings inclined his head at the medical student who was clerking on the ward. "What'll cause tarry stools?"

The student thought a moment. "Tarry stools could be caused by iron medication or blood . . . those are the commonest ones."

Rawlings nodded in approval and spoke to Brandt. "Better check on him and see if he's bleeding from somewhere in the GI tract." Something in the work-up caught his interest and he read more slowly. Reflectively, he closed the chart and came over to the foot of the bed, looking down at Walder. His hand rested on Walder's foot, and finally he patted it quite gently and said softly, "I'll be seeing you again, old man." He winked at Brandt and left, walking rather slowly, which was unusual for him.

Brandt jotted down the request for a gastrointestinal investigation, and got the tube. Passing a tube is no fun for anybody connected with it. It goes through a nostril, through the nasopharynx, oropharynx, and down the esophagus — if one is lucky. Brandt chilled the tube in a pan of ice and lubricated it with mineral oil, but on the first pass it curled up in the pharynx. That was enough for Walder. He whispered hoarsely to Brandt that he would eat for him if he would only get him what he could eat.

"And what do you eat?"

"Meat," said Walder. "Old meat."

"How old?"

"The older, the better."

"Well, that's easy. I'll have the chef get you an old gamy steak."

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"And," said Walder, "he must not cook it."

"If you want it raw, you can have it raw." Brandt was obliging.

"And," said Walder, "it must not be an animal steak."

"What must it be?" asked Brandt, beginning to doubt.

Walder hesitated a moment, looked at the intern, then looked at the tube. The answer came softly in his cavernous whisper, "Human meat."

Brandt cleared his throat as authoritatively as he could. "All right now, Mr. Walder, let's try this tube once more. Just relax."

They tube fed him. But everything went right through undigested. And Walder got weaker and weaker. They had medical consultants in and they talked about sprue, anemias, anastomotic short circuits in the intestinal tract, and they shook their heads. The chest ray was negative. His GI series were within normal limits. He just seemed to be starving to death.

Then the case in the corner across the ward, the one with glycemic gangrene of the leg, died.

Walder felt it happen. It was a little after 1 A.M. The pumping became fainter in the corner, and finally it skipped a few times and then stopped altogether. Walder could sense the dead one across the ward. For some time now he'd known the leg was dead. But now he knew that all of the man was dead. Slowly, creakingly he got up and slid over the edge of the bed. Straight across the ward he went, like a thirsty animal nearing a spring. And it was as he thought. Almost a full hour passed before he heard the orderly coming down the hall. By the time the door was unlocked he was back in bed.

Presiding at the special meeting was Dr. Heinrich Fuchs, chief of the psychiatric service, a wise and learned man. He'd seen and heard a great many things and what he hadn't seen or heard himself, he'd read about. But, he had said, never before had he known of a thing like this happening in a hospital. In cemeteries, yes, but never in a hospital.

Dr. Mayer, the pathologist, who always personally checked every cadaver in the hospital, was finishing his report. "I would say the marks were those of human teeth. An area 12 centimeters by 9 centimeters on the anterior aspect of the thigh was denuded of skin and the underlying portions of the rectus femoris, vastus intermedius and sartorius muscles were apparently devoured, exposing about five centimeters of femur. Tentative bites appear to have been made on the neck, chest and upper extremities. Through the jugular vein, apparently, most of the blood was drained off."

The abundant use of "apparently" was characteristic of Mayer's profes-

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sionally conservative attitude, but his opinion as to the physical factors involved settled the matter, for he had examined more bodies than all the other men put together. Numerically, his autopsy record was unrivaled in the world. He put down the notes he had been referring to and looked quizzically at the assemblage. "Is it not strange that so many seemingly inexplicable happenings occur on the psychiatric wards?" He paused for a moment: "Perhaps where science ends, the mysterious begins."

Fuchs was on his feet instantly, his choleric color almost concealing the frenzied pumping of the distended artery on his forehead. But before he could manage coherent speech the Chief of Staff smoothly intervened, calming Fuchs and reminding Mayer that his last remarks were out of order.

This was not the first time dissension had bloomed between the psychiatrist and the pathologist. Their enmity was a byword in the hospital. It was true, of course, that things difficult to understand sometimes occurred in the psychiatric wards, and Fuchs was a figure about whom a host of legends had sprung up, legends ranging from his obsession with the color purple to his ability to dominate student nurses. Much of his success with patients was believed to be due to his phenomenal power as a hypnotist, but many thought there was an element that went beyond the science of hypnosis. In fact, there were several things about him that seemed beyond the scientific pale, especially of that science which can be seen in the test tube. He practised in a world of fears, delusions, dreams, and moods.

Mayer, on the other hand, was a strict materialist, scientifically precise and often boastful of the fact that his reports never described anything that could not be demonstrated in the laboratory. The personalities of the two men seemed as much of an antithesis as did their chosen fields. On several previous occasions they had almost come to blows, and many otherwise dull clinics had been enlivened by the sparks of their conflict.

The Chief of Staff deftly guided the discussion back to the events of the previous night and briefly reviewed the pathological findings.

After a silence, Rawlings spoke. "Necrophagy."

But it didn't seem to relieve the conclave very much.

"Fortunately," said Fuchs, who had almost subsided to his normal color, "it is a closed ward. That narrows our list down considerably. Just the patients in that ward and the attendants having keys to it. I suggest we make rounds on the ward."

Fuchs led the procession and Rawlings followed, briefing the chief on each patient as they reached the bed. When they came to Walder, Fuchs seemed to increase in alertness. "That odor," he said, his Germanic accent harshening the words in his excitement.

"He's had that right along," said Rawlings, "in spite of massive doses of

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chlorophyll. We thought it had improved slightly, but it does seem worse today. I'm afraid you'll have to rule him out, however. He hasn't eaten since admission, his pulse has been imperceptible at the wrist for two days, his blood pressure has dropped below eighty systolic and his respirations were so bad yesterday we've had an oxygen tent standing by *pro re nata*." He lowered his voice and turned away from the patient. "We've expected him to go anytime, and I doubt he has the strength to speak, much less to eat."

Fuchs reached over and grasped the patient's wrist, feeling for the pulsations of the radial artery. Walder opened his eyes. For a long moment Fuchs looked at him. Walder's pulse was strong and full.

"Lie still, brother!" spoke the silent voice. Clear and impelling the radiations came to him from one among the group of white coated men by the bedside. "Breathe slowly and quietly, do not speak, do not move! We can save you if only you will be still."

Walder sought him with his eyes and probed for him with his senses. Then, Walder found his brother. It was the odor that had concealed him at first, the acrid, biting tang of formaldehyde. Walder lay quietly.

Fuchs moved on to the next bed, and the next, until they completed the ward. Then he took the patients' charts and went to his office.

At noon he went to the Ridgewood Cemetery and spent a short time looking at the records. After that, he spent a little longer period at the Bureau of Vital Statistics.

That afternoon he visited the ward. He went straight to Walder's bed.

"When were you born, Joseph Walder?"

Walder opened his eyes and looked at him for a long time, seeing the bright glitter of understanding in his eyes, feeling the tremendous pressure of Fuchs' perceptiveness. The doctor spoke again.

"It was in 1807. And you died in 1863." The doctor leaned over Walder, staring, deep, deep into his eyes.

"You are a ghoul, Joseph Walder." His voice was little more than a whisper. "A ghoul, Joseph Walder." A trace of a smile seemed to twist the doctor's lips, and his eyelids widened suddenly showing a clear ring of white entirely around the iris.

Then, as abruptly as he had come, Fuchs turned and left.

Brandt was pondering the latest report from the lab. Walder's stools were black as tar again. But clinically the patient seemed much improved. It was all screwed up. Brandt would really have liked to see the results of a sternal puncture, the peripheral blood picture being as confused as it was.

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But when the hematologist had tried to get a specimen this afternoon, Walder had taken one look at the shiny sternal punch poised over his breast bone and, yelling something about an iron spike, he'd gone over the sideboards and climbed halfway up the mesh screen on the window. It took four orderlies to get him down and frightened that poor epileptic in the next bed into one hell of a seizure. After that Fuchs had bounced in and muttered over him a while and then had him transferred to room 101, a locked private. And Fuchs had kept the chart. How the devil could you write progress notes without a chart to write them on? Thank God, Brandt thought, he only had four more days on this service. He didn't care if he never saw another psycho in his life.

At the evening meeting of the staff Fuchs told them he had good reason to believe he'd found the patient responsible, but that he must check further before he could definitely say. He wanted time to study the case a little more. He assured the staff there would be no more such incidents, staking his professional reputation on it. But he begged for a little time.

"Perhaps then . . ." he hesitated, choosing his words carefully . . . "we can publish a case history that will startle the entire medical world." His voice became almost confidential. "I believe I have discovered proof of a concept long thought by the medical profession to be purely mythological. I have now only a hypothesis," he hastened to add. "But give me a little time and I'll have facts that anybody can demonstrate in any laboratory."

He accompanied this last remark with a scathing look at Mayer.

His words caused a quick buzz of excitement, with someone calling for an immediate explanation. The surgical chief asked for a résumé of the post mortem findings. Dr. Mayer repeated those details in his slow, carefully emotionless voice. At the end of the factual report, he was asked for his opinion. Removing his thin pince nez, he began to clean them as he continued speaking in his calculated, measured phrases.

"I have personally supervised every necropsy performed in this hospital in the past fourteen years. Before that I was at other institutions. I have seen a small number of similar instances. In every case they were traced to patients either temporarily deranged or purely psychotic. I believe in this instance we will find the same agents at work. We must not let the relative bizarreness of this incident cloud our critical judgment, our common sense. Mythology has no place in a hospital. Not even in the psychiatric ward."

As a rule such a remark would have brought Fuchs sputtering red-faced to his feet. He defended jealously the status of psychiatry as a science, and he and Mayer had long been at verbal scalpels' points over the issue. But tonight, oddly enough, there was no such response, somewhat to the disap-

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pointment of the younger members of the staff. Fuchs bowed slightly in the direction of the pathologist and presented his final plea. "All I ask, gentlemen, is a little time."

There was little more discussion. Everything seemed to have been said. Even Rawlings, who was usually very outspoken for a resident, had surprisingly little to say. He had seemed quite preoccupied all evening. In the end the staff voted Fuchs full power to act as he saw fit, reserving his explanation for not more than two weeks. Few placed much credence in his vague hypothesis, but could see no harm resulting from investigation.

When the meeting broke up, the doctors went their various ways out of the hospital. All but one. Quietly he unlocked the door of 101 and let himself in. Without turning on the lights he went directly to Walder's bedside.

The silent voice spoke again. "*You have acted unwisely, brother. You and your stupidity have threatened the security of the entire under empire. Scientific proof and exposure of your existence would lead to extensive investigation in many realms. No one would be safe. Our years of painstaking work would go for nought. I aid you in leaving here, more out of regard for all of us, than for you.*"

Quietly he waited while Walder put on the rough clothing he had brought him. Then he unlocked the window and the heavy mesh guard. "*Ridgewood is three blocks east. No one will disturb you if you do not idle.*"

Joseph came over and looked at the moon, clear and pale through the window, without glass or mesh to obstruct its cold, dead radiance. How differently he had pictured this moment. Instead of a place in this world he was being sent back to the cemetery, back to the reek of formalin, and dry cotton waste and digging in the hard ground. But he bowed his head, for this brother was high in the empire and wise in the ways of this world.

"*Remember, brother,*" came the whisper, "*stay away from the edge of the cemetery.*"

Joseph Walder stepped out the window and Dr. Mayer watched him cross the hospital yard and turn up Andrews Avenue toward the cemetery. The doctor muttered several things to himself with a vehemence that would have startled his associates, accustomed as they were to his calm, dispassionate manner. He locked the door of the room and went to his lab to pick up the heart and pair of kidneys that he'd asked the diener to freeze for him so that he could take them home to dissect and study. They were in the freezing compartment wrapped in tinfoil. He weighed the package tentatively in his hands and the troubled look occasioned by Walder seeped out of his eyes. He put on his hat and coat rather quickly and as he went out the door on his way home he was almost humming.

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R. Bretnor, we are coming to realize, is as variable in his styles and moods as he is in the markets to which he sells. He appears in the most popular slicks and pulps, and in the most recondite quality and "little" magazines. He can write wildly farcical science fiction, quietly chilling fantasy . . . and occasionally as completely unclassifiable a story as this, first published three years ago in that admirable California quarterly "journal of interpretation," the Pacific Spectator. *Look for no trace here of the mad creator of Papa Schimmelhorn and his* gnurrs; *but discover a new aspect of Bretnor as he reveals an unsuspected poetic symbolism behind the classic science fiction theme of the shifting time-fault.*

Finale

by R. BRETNOR

When it happened, time collapsed. There was no true explosion; it was too vast for that. Nor was there sound. The rigid structure of the four dimensions cracked, releasing forces too deep to be perceived; and time was telescoped. Great, quivering segments of the vanished past appeared and intermerged, displaced the terrible present, and dissolved.

A yellow fog still clung in pools to the dark hollows of the rounded hills; and every pool of fog, when there were winds, swayed heavily, fraying its edges against the seared stones and the Pompeiian ash-forms of the dead. Padded with ash, the path crept out of the hidden gully and up the hill, the last before the river bed was reached; and slowly the procession struggled through the fog, out to the crest, where a fine, slow-falling rain of ash glowed gray.

There were eight. Manton and the priest led the way, with the cripple held between them. His wooden platform hung by its leather straps, and its roller-skate wheels clicked with every step. Those wheels were pavement wheels; and so they carried him. But the priest, a white-faced, square man in shredded black, kept his face turned away so that he would not have to see the cloth cap full of cheap lead pencils clutched in the cripple's hand.

Manton was taller than the priest, and leaner. A paste of sweat and ashes plastered his brown hair to his forehead, but his brown double-breasted suit

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was curiously intact. When, with every dozen steps, the procession paused for breath, his eyes, weary under their granulated lids, stared at the near and far horizons of the jumbled world.

Behind them walked the man in uniform, with the counter which had ceased to click, choked by the radiation of the yellow fog. Behind them walked the man in leather, with sword and casque, whom they had first seen standing guard at a stone sally port behind which neither castle nor courtyard lay. Then came a woman in a fur coat, crying silently, and a fat old man whose burned skin hung from his hands like a pair of moist, gray gloves. The naked brown girl lagged behind, for she could not quite believe that her child was dead. Sometimes she stopped, and opened the rabbit-skin apron in which she had it wrapped, and tried to shake it into life.

Slowly, so, they climbed the hill, and crossed it, and looked down into the dry channel of the river. As they went down, an avenue of sunlight opened from above, grass grew again beneath their feet, a wavering, ghostly tree became opaque and rustled in a reborn breeze. The river again flowed placidly between its banks, washing the steps of a small stone jetty on the other side, where a boatman, his oars shipped askew, dozed in the idle sun, brass buckles on his shoes flashing cheerfully as the bluff-bowed boat swayed in the current.

Manton breathed deeply, holding each breath an instant, trying to hoard the freshness of the flowing river. Behind him, as they crossed the crest, the counter chattered; and, with a ritual apathy, the man in uniform announced its voice. Then they descended, shuffling and stumbling, down through the grass, down to the water's edge. There they paused. Manton and the priest lowered the cripple, placing him with his back against the tree. They brought him water from the river, and his brown, unshaven monkey-face wrinkled in a grin as he drank it greedily. He alone showed no dismay, as though the riverbank were a familiar gutter, the tree a wall, and the others, on the grass around him, the heedless passers-by of his experience. Unlistened-to, he talked.

Beside the priest, Manton rested on his back, while his mind searched frantically for order in the chaos, darting like a trapped fly to the false light of each conclusion, beating itself against the walls of blank impossibility. Disciplining his voice, Manton made it say, "We know enough of structure to guess what happened. We know that time has collapsed upon itself — a crushed accordion. But why all this?" Manton turned his head toward the priest. "Why fragments, bits of this and that?" He pointed to the man in leather. "Why is he here? And that Indian girl?"

The priest did not reply. Kneeling with locked hands, closed eyes, chin on his chest, he muttered the calendar confession of his sins. Bewildered,

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he watched them pass in memory's review, and he saw that now sins of the flesh seemed small, while overshadowing, overwhelming them loomed sins against the spirit which yesterday had not seemed sins at all, but were today the inescapable mantles of damnation. The priest did not hear Manton's voice, and the voice of the cripple reached him only as a thin harmonic of his own.

"There's no sense to it," complained Manton. "Chunks of it come up — just chunks — and then they disappear. But into what? And why do these remain behind?" Pausing, pointing at the brown girl, he saw the woman in the fur coat before him on all fours. Tears ran down the gullies of her nose into her open mouth as she stared at him, her puffed white face stricken with an astonishment that stopped the fountains of the mind; and Manton wondered whether he, too, wore that look.

"Why do the hills vanish, and the solid stones?" he asked her. "Why not the men too? They vanished once before with all the rest." He thought of days, years, centuries sweeping by in all the decency of birth and life and death; and the woman in the fur coat stared at him mutely through her tears. "We know," said Manton, "that life has different laws. Schroedinger showed us that. But what have chromosomes to do with this? The evanescent matrix disappears. It leaves this girl behind, alive and solid. Why?"

He knew that he would receive no answer from the woman; that the seeking question was meaningless to her astounded idiocy. There in front of him she knelt, embodiment of his confusion, his own trapped mind made flesh. In her blind eyes, he saw the ghost of that mindless brutality which had destroyed a world; he felt it stir within him, stirring him with a quick urge to kill her, crush her — and slay the ghost in scapegoat suicide. Instead, he seized the shoulders of the priest's black coat, to shake the man out of his clutching sins.

"Father," said Manton, "let's be on our way."

The priest looked up and nodded. He did not ask why they should now move on, nor where their road might lead. At Manton's side, he turned toward the east, toward the river.

"Hey!" Manton shouted. "You there, with the boat!"

The boatman stirred, and Manton saw him yawn as he sat upright on the thwart.

"Hey! Fetch us across!"

"Aye!" The boatman's voice came back, heavy as treacle. "I will, for thrirpence ha'penny!"

Manton hesitated, and mechanically his hand searched his trousers pocket, touching a key ring and a coin or two. He brought the largest out, and held it up.

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The boatman waved. He turned around, showing a brawny back, and cast off easily into the current. His oars came to life. He brought the boat about, sending it forward with measured, powerful strokes. Then, twenty, thirty yards — The rhythm broke. Slowly the large hands fell; the river took control; the oars floated like dead, broken arms. And Manton saw the boatman raise his head to face the maddened sky.

Manton's throat tightened for a shout, to call him back, to stem that drifting with a rope of sound. But no sound came. Though the river flowed, it wavered now, its bright skin gone, its insubstantial surface elusive in the air. The jetty wavered, and the green freshness drained from the grass, and an ashen gray sucked substance from a tree no longer green. While Manton watched that silent second death, the ashes came, the fine ash sifting in the air he breathed, coarse ashes carpeting the ground, and a gray, tattered tapestry of ash revealing through its rents the blackened boulders in the river bed.

Without a word, the priest and Manton picked the cripple up. Without a word, the small procession formed, and left the shore to pick a way across the river's grave. They crossed, and as they crossed thin tongues of yellow fog licked at their feet from hollows in the ash.

Padded with ash, the path crept out of the hidden gully and up the hill, and slowly the procession struggled up the path. The shattered hours had passed, and now a dark gray murk swathed all the sky, a gradual darkening, subtle and encroaching, like fall of night without a setting sun. Through that bleak, ashen darkness, bowed by the cripple's weight, Manton and the priest still led the rest. But now there were more than eight. Behind the brown girl four men walked, dressed in hairy skins, weaponed with iron, wearing horned helmets on their maned heads. A hunter followed, tall and yellow, his short curved bow in hand. Then came a mitered abbot, and one who wore a rope around his neck, and the people of a cobbled market street, and all the rest whom Manton had not seen.

He had not seen them, except as figures in the sifting ash, indefinite, featureless, all their distinctions of nation, sex, and age erased in the gray anonymity of that ragged serpentine which wandered where he led. He had not seen them, but he had heard the scuffling of their feet against the stones, the shuffle of unnumbered feet treading the ashes in his wake.

As he reached the crest, Manton stopped and spoke across the cripple to the priest. "Where are we going?" he asked. And, as the priest slowly shook his head, his mind began again its senseless grappling with the why of it. "Where are we taking them?" he asked, and his words fell like ashes on the air.

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Then Manton looked ahead, and saw that they had reached an endless plain, terrible and gray, with here and there a mound, a ridge, a burned gray pinnacle of ash. He saw the gray murk of the sky, now unrelieved. And through that murk he saw that there were more processions toiling forward on the plain. Not daring to contemplate their numbers, he walked on.

Manton and the priest walked very slowly now. The ashes on the ground were thick and soft. The dark, descending sky rained silence on the world. They walked interminably, carrying their burden, slowly, and slowly, and more slowly still. And then they halted there, and there they stood, listening, listening. Around them they heard the breathing of a host, like the enormous breathing of the sea, as though each separate single wave since time began had suddenly received a simultaneous being. And with that host they breathed.

Abruptly, then, down through the darkness came a single beam of brilliant blood-red light, knife-thin. Manton raised his head. The breathing stopped. And slowly the heavens split from end to end. Blood-red and golden came the vast flood of light.

They waited, Manton and the cripple and the priest. In utter silence, they waited for the sound.

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The trouble with "indescribable horrors" is that writers almost invariably no sooner label them as indescribable than they proceed to describe them. The result is usually, as Phil Stong once wrote, "something like dinosaurs and something like burnt leather pillowcases celebrating the original Chicago World's Fair," inescapably tentacled, and about as horrifying as the average creampuff. We doff our hats to Ralph Robin, a too infrequent writer of fantasy who here makes his first appearance in F&SF, for keeping his nameless beach thing offstage and undescribed, and achieving as urbane and indirect an understatement of pure psychic terror as we have encountered in years.

The Beach Thing

by RALPH ROBIN

TUESDAY night a girl named Claire wept on his new slip covers. She said, "I only want to marry you because I want to look after you. I love you."

Wednesday night a girl named Clarissa wiped her nose on his new silk tie. She said, "I only want to marry you because I want to look after you. I love you dearly."

George P. Cornwell ran away.

He ran to a summer resort on the South Carolina shore. It was winter and the hotel was almost empty. There were just four guests besides George.

There was Sibyl McLeod who said she was psychic and was.

There was Mr. Baker who said he was wealthy and wasn't.

And there was a couple named Weatherby.

There was also the owner of the hotel, Edgar Downie, a little man with a brown-and-white cat.

George was quickly absorbed into the social life, which consisted of eating three meals a day at separate tables in the hotel dining room and talking in the lobby and on the porch. His other pastimes were solitary: sleeping, shaving, cleaning his teeth, taking baths, reading, and walking on the beach. He did not overeat, overexercise, or underexercise. George was a young man who wanted very much to live to be an old man.

Obviously George needed no one to look after him. He realized now that he had gone too far in letting the girls think otherwise, though the pretense was useful for a healthful sex life.

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A disadvantage of his hiding place was the lack of someone to have a healthful sex life with. Sibyl McLeod was forty-five and skinny. Mrs. Weatherby was young enough and rather pretty — but George believed that sex life with married women was unhealthful. He made the best of things, especially since he may have overindulged lately. A rest would be good for him.

George wrote to no one. But the women guests, at least, sent postcards to their friends and relatives telling them that the weather was "grand — sunny in the daytime with an invigorating breeze — brisk and clear at night. And the food! Sea food *and* meat every night, so delicious. What desserts! I wish you could taste the strawberry pie with whipped cream."

One night George ate moderately but with enjoyment of scalloped oysters, pink roast beef, and the leafier vegetables. He firmly refused the pastry; he finished his milk slowly, and joined the other guests in the lobby.

Mr. Baker was panting happily. He had eaten the whole dinner and also a large trout which he had caught in the back country and which the cook had fried for him.

"I feel better," he said.

The Weatherbys grinned politely.

"Yes sir," Mr. Baker said, raising his voice to include Edgar Downie, who was behind the hotel desk typing a letter. "They're treating me so good I'm thinking of staying all winter. Maybe I'll move one of my little old businesses here and stay for keeps."

Sibyl McLeod rubbed her choker of pearl beads. She said, "I feel strange. It's the same feeling I had before the poltergeist got away from my Aunt Louise and broke the Delft bowl."

"We have a Delft tea set," Mrs. Weatherby said. "We picked it up when we were abroad."

"Do you think there is a poltergeist at large in the hotel, Miss Sibyl?" George asked, adopting the local form of address.

"The impression is not clear. I don't think it's a poltergeist and I don't think it's exactly in the hotel."

Mr. Baker winked a heavy eyelid at George and sucked at his cigar.

Sibyl McLeod rose without a curved motion. She walked to the desk and whispered with Edgar Downie. George and the others could see that she asked a question and he answered. She dismissed the hotelkeeper with an angular gesture and returned to her chair.

Very solemnly she said, "He doesn't know where the cat is."

"I wonder if the cat may have come to harm at the hands of an elemental." George assumed a grave look.

Sibyl McLeod stared at him while he struggled to keep his eyes serious.

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"This is nothing to be made light of, young man, least of all by you," she said sharply.

"I wouldn't worry about that old tabby, Miss Sibyl," said Mr. Baker. "She's a smart old tabby. She knows her way around. Probably taking a walk on the beach looking for a fish head. Brother Downie's not worrying, and you know how attached he is to his cat. You're not fretting yourself about the cat, are you, Brother Downie?"

Edgar Downie stopped typing. "It's not like her to stay out on a cold — I mean cool night like this. But I'm not worrying. As long as my guests are happy and pay their bills I don't worry about a thing." He laughed to show he was joking about the bills.

Baker at once began to tell a story about a speculation in real estate.

Sibyl McLeod sat stiffly, rubbing her pearls and often turning to look at the glass doors to the porch, to the dark beach. The Weatherbys bobbed and shook their heads at Baker's story. George wondered when it would be safe to go back to Philadelphia. The general manager had told him he could take a month's leave — but the company was paying him for only two weeks.

The cat came miauling to the door. They let her in and she walked around trembling and hissing and wouldn't let anyone touch her. It was odd conduct for Downie's cat, one of the least neurotic cats in South Carolina. Sibyl McLeod, reaching to stroke her, had to dodge a quick claw. Edgar came from behind the desk and talked to the cat. She tried to scratch even him, but he was able to convince her that she was safe at home now no matter what had happened on the beach. He thought she had been frightened by an unusually aggressive dog.

"There's something on that beach, and it's not a dog," Sibyl McLeod said.

Mrs. Weatherby said, "Three years ago when we were in Atlantic City a whale was washed up on the beach."

"It was five years ago," Mr. Weatherby said.

Sibyl McLeod's unrouged face tightened. "If I only knew what it was. Or what it wanted. I think I know *whom*."

Baker was jovial and sympathetic. "Oh now, Miss Sibyl, you are getting yourself worked into a tizzy. I have a bottle of good bourbon in my car. Let me pour you a drink and —" She turned from him and walked up the stairs.

"Do you think she's off her trolley?" Baker asked.

"Certainly," said George.

Edgar Downie looked at his guests indifferently and at his cat warmly and went back to typing. He didn't even look up when Sibyl McLeod came

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down the steps wearing a coat, her hair tied in a scarf. She moved among the people and the loveseats while Downie tap-tap-tapped on his typewriter. She opened the door to the beach and left them.

"I think it's awfully cold to take a walk," Mrs. Weatherby said.

Her husband was drowsy. Baker poked his knee to wake him, and went on with the story about the speculation in real estate. George felt his metabolism moving softly like the motor of a new car. His eyes were open, but for minutes at a time he heard Baker only vaguely. Once Baker asked, "What would you have done, Cornwell?" and he answered, "Exactly the same thing."

When again the words focused, Baker was saying, "I got the corner lot and the lot next to it and I had two hundred front feet altogether. The auctioneer saw what was happening and was going to call off the whole thing — old man Jenkins kept pulling at his coat — but the man from the bank said, 'No sir. You used the bank's name and you're going through with it or you'll never sell another square foot in this state.' Old man Jenkins was about ready to bawl —"

Mrs. Weatherby screamed. Her scream turned to words and fell to a gasping whisper. "Something is happening to Miss McLeod," she said.

Mr. Weatherby showed no surprise — no reaction at all.

George said, "Evidently she has received brain waves from Sibyl by extrasensory perception. Because she's the only woman here, probably. It would not be like Sibyl to exchange brain waves with a man."

Baker winked at Mr. Weatherby. "Women, women. My second wife screamed so loud one night that our next door neighbor thought it was the siren and rushed off to the firehouse wearing his red helmet. Where was I? Anyway, I bid in the whole kit and caboodle for something less than nine thousand dollars. And I turned it over one month later for twenty-seven thousand five hundred."

"I dated a real estate man before I met Lawrence," Mrs. Weatherby said.

Edgar Downie's typewriter clicked amiably.

Sibyl McLeod came back. Where her face was not red from the cold beach wind, it was very pale. "I was right," she said. "There is something on that beach."

She let Baker help her into a chair. She blew her nose efficiently in a sheet of kleenex; then delicately touched her lips with a filmy handkerchief. "It was horrible."

"What was it, Miss McLeod?" George asked.

"It was love."

"Why, that doesn't sound so horrible, Miss Sibyl," Baker said, laughing heh-heh, a good-humoured fat man.

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"You needn't laugh heh-heh," said Sibyl McLeod. "It was horrible the way the word really means. It filled me with horror. It was fearful. It filled me with fear." She rubbed and twisted her pearl choker. The necklace broke, and the pearl beads dropped and rolled. Mr. Weatherby began to pick them up.

Mrs. Weatherby was puzzled. "But love isn't horrible or fearful," she said. "It's sweet."

"This love was sweet. Sweet and thick like honey. And I felt like a fly being buried deeper and deeper in the honey till it dies."

"You're still with us, praised be the Lord," Baker said.

"Amen," George said.

"It wasn't looking for me. It expectorated me." Sibyl McLeod began suddenly to cry. George, who hated crying women, was annoyed. He decided she was acting.

She jerked away from Baker when he patted her shoulder.

He said kindly, "You've had a real shock and I'm real sorry for you, but it must have been some kind of an attack of nerves. Women get them. My third wife used to imagine all kinds of things. There's nothing on that beach that's not supposed to be on that beach and I'm going out and take a walk and come back and prove it to you."

Something strengthened in Sibyl McLeod. She wiped the tears from her face; they left no mark. She adjusted her lean shoulders. "What is on that beach is supposed to be on that beach, but it is not looking for you."

"Why then I'll look for it, ma'am. A little air will be good for my digestion." With a sudden dance step, not clumsy, Baker caricatured himself and he went out the door.

"He should have put on a coat," said Mrs. Weatherby.

Edgar Downie calmly worked until the sealed envelopes made a good stack. He patted them together neatly, covered the typewriter, and sociably sat among his guests. "It's not lively like the summer," he said, "but it's a fine place for a rest. Fine place for a rest."

"A little tedious, though," George said.

"Well, it's not lively like the summer," Edgar Downie admitted.

"I wonder you stay open," Mr. Weatherby said.

"Well, we do some business and you'd be surprised what it costs to reopen a place that was empty all winter. I've tried both ways."

Sibyl McLeod bent toward the hotelkeeper. "Have psychic phenomena been frequent here in recent months?"

"Miss Sibyl, until you came here there has never been a psychic phenomenon in or near my hotel." He blushed; for it was not the kind of remark that the owner of a resort hotel should make to a guest.

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But Sibyl McLeod was pleased. "It must be my aura," she said. "There are psychic phenomena wherever I go, even in church."

Mrs. Weatherby screamed. "Now something is happening to Mr. Baker," she said.

"Of course," said Sibyl McLeod.

"Naturally," George added.

Sibyl McLeod looked at him for a long time. He didn't like the way she looked at him; she reminded him of the mother of a girl he almost had to marry when he was twenty. "You are the last one that should be joking, Mr. George Paul Cornwell. My advice to you is to stay inside till daylight and then go home to Philadelphia."

George had not thought of going outside; he had not thought of the dark beach, slipping now into the irritable ocean. But it would be fun to walk in the wind on the dry sand and the wet sand and to come back and tell an amusing lie about the supernatural creature he had met. Unless Baker, a born liar, did it first; probably what he was up to.

I am supposed to be on the beach, George thought, and he corrected himself — it would be fun.

Mrs. Weatherby said, "I hope Mr. Baker doesn't catch a cold. He should have worn a coat."

"Wasn't something worse happening to him?" George asked.

Mrs. Weatherby looked puzzled.

"Typical amnesia," Sibyl McLeod said, patting Mrs. Weatherby's hand.

Mrs. Weatherby smiled proudly.

"You fellows ought to try our surf fishing," Edgar Downie said. "We're sort of famous for it." Conversation flickered.

The glass door with its starched triangles of curtain was opened decisively, and Mr. Baker came in. He looked cold but carefree and he rubbed his fat cheeks.

"Well, how did *you* like it?" asked Sibyl McLeod.

"Cold for walking." He pressed his ears.

"You know what I'm talking about. How did you like the manifestation?"

"If you're talking about your ghost, ma'am, I didn't see hide nor hair of him. Both you ladies can sleep tight tonight." He was the good-humoured fat man laughing heh-heh.

Sibyl McLeod's snort was well-bred but distinct.

Baker bowed good night to the ladies. On the stairs he turned and remarked casually, "Brother Downie, would you mind fixing up my bill? I have to be in Charleston in the morning and I thought I might as well check out and drive down there tonight. Don't know how long I'll have to be there."

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Sibyl McLeod's snort was less well-bred.

"Nice chap in his way," said Mr. Weatherby. "Sorry to see him go."

When no one in the room talked George could hear the ocean arguing with the land. The dark world waited. The pull was growing stronger. George disciplined his thoughts, refusing to recognize the force that was drawing him from the antimacassared chair. He would invent a story so fantastic that it might wake up even Weatherby and the little hotel man. He would confirm Sibyl's story part of the way and go on from there; it would be interesting to see how she would take that.

He went to his room for his coat. Somewhere there was his fountain-pen flashlight. He found it in the drawer of the night table with his keys and vitamin capsules and travelers' checks, and he put it in his pocket.

"You're wise to wear a coat," Mrs. Weatherby said.

"Young man, I'm sorry for you," Sibyl McLeod said.

"Do you think you really should go out?" Mr. Weatherby said.

George — and Sibyl McLeod too — stared at him. He actually looks intelligent, George thought, and concerned. He's probably a man with common sense at any rate. If he asks me if I really should go out —

"There are more things on earth than the philosophers in heaven ever dreamed up," Mr. Weatherby added.

"Are you sure that's right?" George said, wishing there were someone worth grinning to.

"I'm afraid it is," Mr. Weatherby said sadly.

What a fool, George thought. He opened the door and went out. Mr. Weatherby shook his head like a man who had done his best. He looked at his watch. "Time to go to bed," he remarked.

"Don't you dare take Mrs. Weatherby away," Sibyl McLeod said. "She's helping to make this such an interesting night."

"I think I will stay and chat for a bit, Lawrence," Mrs. Weatherby said. "You run along if you wish."

Mr. Weatherby rose, rather hesitantly. "Well. Well. Good night, everybody."

As he climbed the stairs, his wife said confidentially, "He's really not going to bed. He's working on the proofs of his new biography of Shakespeare."

"How very nice," Sibyl McLeod said absently. "Now you take a poltergeist" — her thoughts were evidently following a path of their own. "After all, there is very little difference between a poltergeist and a big overgrown boy. Aunt Louise was quite attached to hers, even after the Delft bowl, and she refused several offers by specialists to send him back to the other side. She left him to Cousin Emily when she passed on. Why, I'd rather have

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two or three poltergeists in this very room than have that manifestation prowling the beach outside."

Edgar Downie's face settled into an innkeeper's look of polite despair. "I am sure we could make their stay a pleasant one," he said, and blushed.

Mrs. Weatherby said earnestly, "Miss McLeod, do you really think that the nice young man is in danger?"

"If he is, he has nobody to blame but himself. Just the same I am sorry for George Paul Cornwell." But Sibyl McLeod's eyes were more shrewd than sorry. "My dear, you can do something for — him. You are quite gifted, whether you know it or not. What I want you to do is to close your eyes and think about the sky. Make a picture of it in your mind. Do you remember how the Big Dipper looks?"

Mrs. Weatherby nodded. Her eyes were closed, pressed tight as if she were waiting for somebody to put a piece of candy in her mouth.

"Think of the stars in the Big Dipper. Watch them. Tell us what happens. And don't speak until something happens. And don't you speak either, Mr. Downie, please."

For perhaps five, perhaps ten, minutes the two women and the hotelkeeper were silent. Then, in a low voice, Mrs. Weatherby began to talk. "The stars are getting dim. I can hardly make out the Dipper any more. The thin moon is paler than I've ever seen it. The air is getting thick in the oddest sort of way. Thick and sweet as honey."

Like a hypnotist's subject told she is eating something good, Mrs. Weatherby beamed with childish pleasure. For the time of a few breaths, breathed deeply, Mrs. Weatherby enjoyed what she was enjoying. Then her expression was doubtful. Then her face twisted to the other look — the disgust of the subject when she thinks she is eating something bad. She looked so nauseated that Edgar Downie half rose to help her. He was stopped by her words, which came from her as from far away. "*Not honey. Not honey from bees. Not honey from the bees that played in the clover, long ago. I am not the boy-bee in the clover but a man-fly sinking into . . . love . . .*"

Mrs. Weatherby opened her eyes, and opened her mouth wide to scream. But Sibyl McLeod screamed before she had a chance; possibly because she thought death was too serious for Mrs. Weatherby to do the screaming.

Edgar Downie turned from Mrs. Weatherby to Sibyl McLeod, whose tongue was bright red under the bridge lamp. "What nice round tones you have, Miss Sibyl," he said. "Did you ever think of taking singing lessons?"

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In which is shown the proper conduct for a young man who encounters a dragon and a lovely lady, in that order, on Somerset or any other street.

Dragon on Somerset Street

by ELMER ROESSNER

THE day started off badly. The gin bottle was unaccountably empty, so I had to have my tomato juice straight. The toast burned. The coffee was weak. In flipping my egg over, I missed completely and the top of the stove looked like an admiral's wardrobe.

As I left the house, I discovered a dragon in the gutter. My first thought was that it was small for a dragon. Then I realized I had no basis for comparison. It was smaller than the paper dragon they parade in Chinatown and larger than an alligator.

I dashed back into the house and dialed the police. "There's a dragon in Somerset Street," I shouted.

"Who's dragging what?" asked the desk sergeant.

"A dragon!" I said. "A dragon. A live dragon!"

"Son," said the sergeant, "you'd better go home and sleep it off." He hung up.

I dialed the fire department. "Look," I said, "there is a dragon in Somerset Street. A live one."

"What's burning?" the fire department asked.

"Nothing's burning. It's not a fire-breathing dragon. Just the ordinary kind."

"Oho!" said the fire department. "So you're one of those Communists who go around spreading scare stories. Tell me who you are. I dare you."

I hung up and returned to the street. The dragon wasn't in the gutter. But a block away I saw a circle of people, and I ran down.

The dragon was in the center of the circle and the circle was a large one because everyone was keeping a wary distance. Someone had thrown a cinder block on the dragon's tail. The tail was crushed and bleeding and the block pinned the dragon to the spot. A route man for Sheffield Dairy had advanced on the beast and was trying to brain it with a bottle of homogenized milk.

He was having no success. The dragon's head was small and at the end of a

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snakelike neck three feet long. The dragon kept weaving and dodging. Besides, the milkman was keeping safely outside the orbit of the milk bottle.

"Here! What are you trying to do?" I shouted. "Stop it!"

"I'll kill the damn thing," the milkman said. "It's a menace."

"No. Don't do it!" I cried.

"Listen, mister," said the milkman. "I got a lot of little babies on my route. They depend on Sheffield and me. I got kids of my own. I'll risk my life any day to protect them."

"Wait a minute, buddy," I said. "I used to be a member of the union myself. Worked for Borden's. Be calm a minute. Look, this is a scientific wonder. Probably the only living dragon in the world. The last one. Do you want to go down in history with Jon Brandsson and Sigurdr Islefsson, the men who killed the last two great auks? Or with Bartmoleus Szpakowicz, the man who killed the last European wisent?"

The milkman looked at me quizzically. "You mean it may be worth something if we catch this crockagator?"

"Probably," I said. "Let's not kill it."

I looked at the beast. Its body was not unlike that of an alligator, greenish yellow and about six feet long, continuing another three feet in a tail. The tail was scaly and thinner than an alligator's and it did not have a spade tip as St. George's dragon had. The small head on the long thin neck was shaped like a snake's, and a forked tongue darted out of its mouth. The eyes were Della Robbia blue, slightly bloodshot.

"Wait here," I said to the milkman. "I'll phone and find out. Don't let it get away."

I ran into the new apartment house on the corner and rapped on the first door on the right. "Can I use your phone?" I asked, as the door opened.

The woman who had opened the door smiled. She had a shock of tousled black hair and a round face in which dimples danced as she smiled. She had a purple dressing gown drawn tightly about her. Almost too tightly.

"Of course you can use the phone. Come in." She led the way to the living room and waved me toward a sofa.

"Sorry to crash in this way," I said, "but there's a dragon out there — at least I think it's a dragon."

She sat down beside me and said, "You're excited. You're all perspiry." She ran a soft hand across my forehead.

"You were trying to find out if I'm feverish," I said, accusingly. "Well, I'm not. I'm perfectly normal. No insanity in my family, either, although I do have an aunt who collects shaving mugs. There really is a strange animal out there on the street, and I want to make a phone call about it."

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"How exciting!" she said. "I just moved here, and I had no idea I was moving out where dragons roam."

"And the skies are not cloudy all day. May I have the Manhattan phone book?"

"Surely," she said. "Would you like a cup of coffee, too? I just made it."

"You bet!"

She handed me the phone book and then called from the kitchen, "With a dash of brandy?"

"You bet!" I said. I started to look up the number of Willy Ley, who knows all about extinct animals, but I remembered he was in Stockholm getting some sort of prize. So I dialed the Museum of Natural History, and when a girl answered, I said, "Can I talk to the dragon man?"

"Sorry," she said. "He's leading an expedition in Komodo."

"Well, have you somebody in alligators?"

"There's Dr. Jones in crocodiles. Will he do?"

I was connected with Dr. Jones who wanted to know who I was.

"My name is Roessner," I told him. "I just found a dragon."

"Spell it."

"D-R-A-G-O-N."

"Mr. Dragon?"

"No, Mr. Roessner. R-O-E-S-S-N-E-R. R as in Oyster, O as in oyster —"

"Or as in Octopoda," Dr. Jones put in.

"Look!" I fairly screamed. "I can have you expelled from Pixies Anonymous for that! Now listen carefully. I just discovered a dragon. It's in Somerset Street right now. It's a real dragon. Nonextinct, too."

"Well, Mr. Oyster," said the doctor, "if you will give me your address, I'll send you Form 57M on which to make a report. If your discovery is valid, I am sure the museum authorities will give you proper recognition, perhaps granting you the honor of naming the subspecies."

I hung up.

"My name is Maude," said the voice of my hostess. She handed me a cup of brandy, flavored with coffee.

She sat down beside me. Close.

"That's an attractive necktie you're wearing," she said. "I think you can tell an awful lot about a man's character by his choice of neckties, don't you?"

"If it's a hemp necktie, you can. Otherwise, I'm not sure."

"This seems to be such an interesting neighborhood. But I'm so lonely here. I have hardly any friends. Oh, I know a few girls, of course. But no real friends," she said, working the dimples again.

"I'll try to do something about it sometime," I said. I drained my cup.

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"Right now I've got to go out into Somerset Street and see how the dragon is doing."

When I got outside, the crowd was gone, and so was the dragon. Only the cinder block remained; the dragon must have pulled his tail out from under it. From the cinder block, a thin trail of blood led down the street. I followed it to where it disappeared down a sewer culvert. The sewer was one of those built in the great New York sewer scandal of the Twenties. No one knows for sure just where they run or where they come out. From the price the taxpayers paid, they might empty into Lake Okeechobee or the Swanee River. There was no doubt about the finality of the dragon's disappearance.

I looked at my watch. I was late for work — later than usual. I wondered whether to go downtown at that hour or go back and see Maude. I took a coin out of my pocket and spun it high into the air. Heads I would call on Maude, tails I would go to work.

I caught the coin and slipped it back in my pocket without looking at it. I didn't have to look at it. I'd used my two-headed quarter.

Note:

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Two of the Great Clichés of modern science fiction are that human mutants will spring from the release of atomic radiations, and that the telepathic mutant will be an invincible superman. Kris Neville has been shrewd enough to realize that mutations have long been occurring from uncomprehended but certainly pre-Alamogordo sources, and that telepathy may be not a source of power, but rather a tormenting curse — and from these realizations he has wrought a melodrama of future conflicts all the more terrifying for its quietly realistic understatement.

Underground Movement

by KRIS NEVILLE

ON THE SEAT beside him, the brief case bounced and jiggled. He was driving over an old section of road. It had been last repaired in 1950, and unless the government shortly assigned precious manpower to its renovation, it would within another year disintegrate completely beneath the endless pressure of commuter traffic. He stepped down more heavily on the accelerator. The rebuilt engine began to knock.

He hoped his vacation authorization would be lying on the desk he shared with Robert Edd. He could be on a plane for South America by six o'clock. Tomorrow afternoon he would be settled in some tiny time-forgotten village. With the language barrier between him and the natives, he would be isolated for the first time in two years from the ever present pressure of minds unconsciously crying for his sympathy.

To his left and ahead, now that he was almost at the city limits, lay the smooth lawn and white marble monuments of a tree-shaded cemetery.

When the car came abreast, he felt for the second time since breakfast a sharp, pain-like buzzing in his mind. This time it seemed almost to be half formed thoughts, and there was an attendant impression of agony and heat that brought perspiration to his palms. He grappled with it for a moment, trying to understand it, and then it was gone as suddenly as it had come. He shook his head puzzled and afraid. It was too soon for pain.

Inside the city, traffic grew heavier. At Clay Street, he turned left. Seven blocks down, he located the address he wanted. He drew the car to the curb, picked up the brief case, and got out.

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As he walked toward the porch, he imagined the face behind the door. He imagined it in terms of hair color, eye color, ear shape and bone structure. He knocked, hoping to find that the man inside had green hair, orange eyes, pronged ear lobes.

"Yes?" the man said, peering out from behind the half opened door.

He felt his heart pulse at the sight of the expected face. He said, "Mr. Merringo?"

"Yes," the man said, and his voice was dead and listless.

"My name is Wilson. Howard Wilson. May I come in?"

"You're a telepath?" Mr. Merringo said. His voice was still flat and indifferent, but the left side of his mouth quivered with distrust.

"I will not invade the privacy of your thoughts," Howard Wilson said. He had been saying the same formal sentence through a terrifying eternity of faces, and yet each time he felt a fresh anger at the implication which made it necessary.

The man hesitated for a fraction of a second. Then the door swung inward. "Come in," he said sullenly.

In silence Howard Wilson followed him down the narrow hall. His nostrils wrinkled at the stale air, and his eyes were momentarily stunned by the curtained gloom.

Mr. Merringo, a thin, nervous, thirtyish man who walked as if the carpet were insecure, turned left into the living room, which opened off the hall by way of sliding doors, one panel of which was extended. He crossed to the ornamental fireplace. It was littered with nervously twisted paper balls and half smoked cigarettes and ashes and a single, shriveled apple core. He turned to face the telepath. There were dark circles under his eyes, and his mouth was bloodless. "You're from the government? I read somewhere that they hire you."

Howard Wilson glanced at the mirror and saw the ridiculous bump on his forehead, round and blue, like a newly discolored bruise. It was the emblem of a telepath, and it grew, cancerous, from the twentieth year of his life. It would destroy him, eating inward to his mind and shooting malignant cells into his blood for impartial distribution to lungs and stomach and bones, before he was forty. His mouth remained emotionless as he tried to imagine the bump away, and to recall his clear, adolescent forehead in the days before he matured into hearing thoughts he did not want to hear. The mirror image peered back at him, nature's mistake, a false, evolutionary start, unproductive. He turned to the man at the fireplace.

"Yes," he said. "I work for the government." And my employers, he might have added, fear and distrust me more than you do. For them I gather information in the slippery, sterile field of espionage and counter-

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espionage. I carry ashes dead beyond breathing upon. "Please don't be alarmed by my telepathic ability," he said. "I will not use it here; I do not use it often; I would prefer never to use it at all."

"I can't understand why the government would be interested in me."

"It's about your wife," Howard Wilson said, steeling himself uselessly against pity.

Mr. Merringo stared into the telepath's eyes. No flicker betrayed his emotion, but Howard Wilson could feel it, in a quick pulse, and Howard Wilson's mind was sealed.

"Please sit down," Mr. Merringo said.

"Thank you."

Howard Wilson crossed to the sofa. As he sat down, he noticed the faint dust released by the pressure of his body. Looking around the room, his eyes accustomed now to the dimness, he knew that it had not been cleaned or aired for a month or more, and the furniture seemed stiff and cold.

"I've not been myself," Mr. Merringo said. "Not these past few weeks. Perhaps you can understand the shock. . . ?"

Howard Wilson avoided his eyes.

"I hope you'll pardon the appearance of the room," Mr. Merringo said indifferently.

"I'm sorry to bother you at all," Howard Wilson said. He tried to relax. He stroked the brief case on his lap. "I got your name from the hospital."

"I understand."

"Please forgive this necessary question: But you were the father?"

Mr. Merringo seemed about to spring across the room at the telepath. For the first time his eyes were alive. Slowly he forced himself to relax. "Yes," he said after a moment. "I was the father."

Howard Wilson let the tension die on the stale and silent air. His hand fumbled at the zipper of the brief case; he knew without looking that the man was staring hard at his face. His hand jerked, and the zipper caught; and as he bent, focusing a part of his attention on it, he wondered what they expected him to be, people like Merringo and the rest: what cold, unfeeling creature; what super intelligence, what icy, emotionless entity, human in form, demon in mind? He could feel the hostile eyes seem to say, You understand, damn you, and you're laughing at me. . . . But his I. Q. was 120, and he could not understand or interpret any more than anyone else of equal intelligence. He got the zipper free. He drew out the data sheet.

"I'd like to enter a few facial descriptions, if you don't mind, Mr. Merringo . . . If you'll stand still, please."

And after a few moments of inspection and recording, he said, "Turn your head in profile, please . . . That's good."

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Then he was done. "Do you have a recent picture of Mrs. Merringo?"

". . . yes," Mr. Merringo said. He turned listlessly to the shelf above the ornamental fireplace.

Howard Wilson passed a hand across his eyes. There was the static-electric half pain-like shock in his telepathic sense again. It made a variegated blur behind his eyes. It passed. He stared at his hand. It was shaking. He began to feel ill.

The doctor had said — during the final, fatal examination when he was twenty-one — "The pain will be toward the end."

He shook himself. It was not knowledge of death alone that was frightening; men had died before. But he, along with the no more than two dozen other telepaths, all male, all recently come to maturity and under scrutiny, were left to move forward to an uncharted death without previous clue or case history. Nature, like an inefficient potter casting aside thoughtlessly the imperfect instrument, had erred; man was helpless before her. It was the unknown quality that was most frightening. He rubbed his forehead with a moist hand. It was too early for pain.

"Here is the picture," Mr. Merringo said.

Howard Wilson took it automatically. After his heart quieted, he began to enter details on the data sheet. He forced himself to concentrate on the job. "Now, what color was her hair?"

Mr. Merringo told him.

Howard Wilson frowned and glanced quickly at his other data sheet, checking off, mentally, the other factors to eliminate. Only one, now, remained, upon which the whole examination turned.

"Her eyes?"

Mr. Merringo told him.

"Thank you," Howard Wilson said. "You have been very cooperative."

Walking toward his car, Howard Wilson felt clammy. He opened the car door, tossed in his brief case, eased behind the wheel, pressed back against the worn seat cover, and glancing at his watch, decided to postpone the meal until after seeing Miss Ethel Wilberston, sister of the late Edith Collins, whose husband, Emanuel, had jumped in front of a subway train in the East two weeks ago.

He glanced back at the house of Mr. Merringo, seeing a "For Sale" sign slightly awry in the yard. And he wondered why it was that humans always blamed themselves? Instead of eye color or bone structure or God. But he knew the answer. There was something in them individualistic, proud, fierce, terrible, demanding admiration, and yet, pathetic.

As his foot pressed the snarling starter, he closed his eyes wearily, remembering the negative report from South Africa that had been forwarded to

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him for his information. He was aware of the conceit of pride when one man presumes to speak for a thousand square miles, cabling, in code: "It hasn't happened here," after consulting a government man in a light, white suit, drinking, perhaps, gin and quinine to avoid a disease or to keep slightly drunk and only half aware of the high, hot sun and the shimmering, steamy forest beyond the cities and the farms and the flat grass lands.

Opening his eyes, he shifted into low. As the car began to move, he created the scene, detail by detail. The Chieftain, tall, ebony, Oxford educated, seated in tribal glory, surrounded by the squalid bamboo village and his callous-footed subjects. From across the dusty pavillion, a glistening husband cries that his wife is dead in childbirth. And the Chieftain, still half believing in spirits, perhaps, summons the medicine man. Together they go to the spot; together they see the silent newborn thing cuddled in a wrapping of afterbirth; and after a moment, the Chieftain orders, "Bury it." While a white man far away says in a guttural Dutch accent, "Nothing of that sort has occurred here, thank God."

Howard Wilson threaded his way through traffic to the home of Miss Ethel Wilberston to see if her sister's eyes had been the same color as all the other women's.

But the sister was not home, and sticky with the afternoon heat, he drove to the office, unhungry, and suddenly tired and enervated by a growing headache.

The office was in the Federal Building, on the third floor, two rooms above the First National Bank and a branch office for a drug chain.

He had worked out of the office during most of the past year, trying, along with Robert Edd, to break up the opium traffic from Mexico. They had been assigned to the project because someone, somewhere, had decided that the opium traffic was a Communist plot. A little over a month ago they had been reassigned to the investigation of the suddenly appeared mutant wave.

Two of the three district FBI men were in the office when he came in, and they broke off their conversation and glanced at him uneasily. He did not like them, and beneath their automatic smiles of recognition, he knew that it was a mutual dislike. He had never answered their smug, suggestive questions: What's that dame thinking, down there? I'd like to know if maybe she isn't thinking about . . . For it always made him shudder and shrink inward, incapable of explaining the morass of conscious thought and the turmoil of half conscious thought and the deeper, emotionally colored surges that made up the human mind. And under the surface, like a deep, fast current, was a common flow of hope and love and generosity cutting through the turgid intermingling of despair and hate and selfishness.

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It left Howard Wilson mute and afraid; for he saw himself reflected, and the reflection was naked and beyond his judgement.

He put the brief case on the desk and took out the data sheets. His vacation application had not come back.

"I could have checked that guy for you," one of the FBI men said.

Without looking up, Howard Wilson said, "I had nothing to do."

After an uneasy moment, the other agent said, "Find anything new?"

"It's narrowed down to eye color."

"Oh? What do you think?"

Howard Wilson shrugged, feeling itchy and uncomfortable between his shoulder blades. "I couldn't say."

"Okay, okay. Just asking. Skip it."

Suddenly tense and irritable, Howard Wilson clenched his fists at his sides. "I don't . . ." He had started to say in a burst of unreasoning anger, I don't think they know anything about it and I don't think they ever will. It was an involuntary thought, but once it came into his mind, he recognized that until now he had been afraid to admit it even to himself. He felt personally involved and knotted up inside whenever he thought about the mutants. "Never mind," he said.

"It was the Bomb," the first of the FBI men said.

Howard Wilson remained quiet, wondering which of the hundred or so of the Bombs he was talking about.

"Don't *you* think so?"

Howard Wilson shrugged.

The teletype in the far corner of the room began to chatter, and the two FBI men crossed to it. The message rolled out, over the clicking keys, in coded groups.

"The Tokyo report on your stuff," one said to Howard Wilson. "Want to look at it when it's decoded?"

". . . no," Howard Wilson said.

Fifteen years after the Alamogordo Air Base mushroom, they were checking in Phoenix; and hopefully interviewing Bikini natives; and Las Vegas citizens; and Nome residents. While, from secrecy-cloaked sources, reports filtered in from Mexico, Canada, England, France, Germany, and perhaps, too, from behind the Iron Curtain. In less than a month, a hundred-hundred quiet investigations, with not a ripple in the world press, while tense men in Washington moved pins and drew circles.

"See if there's any in Japan," they had doubtless instructed, intending to prove, if there were, that a pair of atom blasts accounted for them.

While Russia bristled menace at Greece from overrun Yugoslavia, and Western Germany champed at the light Allied reins. And the world,

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asunder, quivered, waiting, and each action was a potential spark for the powder line.

Howard Wilson remembered looking right from the Customs Building out over Yokohama, watching fishing boats and barges crowd into the muddy canal (or was that over by the Sakurigecho Station, where you got the train to Tokyo?) watching Yokohama and listening to the rattle of winches and the whine of cable from the docks. The air had a sweet, not altogether pleasant, fishy smell. The natives said, sullen-polite, "*ha-so-deska?*" and "*arigato*," and bowed deeply. They made Howard Wilson uneasy, because he could never be sure he understood them at all, and could never be sure that his failure was not an indictment of himself.

Their eyes were black and beady, but, in the last few months, they had probably buried things in their queer Buddhist grave yards and planted totem sticks over the unknown inside their Gates of Eternity. And probably, too, in cold northern Hokkaido, across the narrow straits from fortress Sakhalin, the Ainu piled snow on deformed mutants and remained silent, while, in the southern part, a Hawaiian interpreter under US Government orders asked the governor, who answered respectfully. "There have been no reports here, either."

Suddenly Howard Wilson knew the immensity of the issue and the futility of seeking the easy explanation in terms of the way things were supposed to happen or had always happened. The Bomb was not the cause, because he had been born before the first one. And there had been the mutant increase in the early forties: odd calves, and queer insects and unique wheat, and flies that began to resist DDT. And the increasing percentage of hereditary cancer. The early, beginning wave of it was easily explained in isolation — for no one would more than chuckle at the bizarre animal discovered in Los Angeles in 1939 that looked to be half racoon and half beaver; and few people would seriously doubt any well established theory merely because what was almost a whale washed ashore dead (of maladaptation, perhaps?) on the Oregon coast.

The FBI men were eyeing him sullenly.

"I'm going home," he said. "You know the number if you want me." He was angry at them, and angry that the government had not approved his vacation application. He wanted to get away for a few weeks and relax and think things out.

The office was silent.

The one FBI man moved toward the data sheets on the table, and Howard Wilson said, without looking directly at him, "It isn't your wife's eye color."

The FBI man stopped, embarrassed. "She's pregnant."

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Pity again, that he did not want to feel. "I'm sorry," he said.

"Wait a minute," the FBI man said, concern suddenly alive in his voice with the hope of release. "How do you know eye color's the signal? How can you be sure? I want you to explain it to me. My wife — I mean, she knows about it, and . . ."

Howard Wilson wanted to say something about security regulations, but instead he merely nodded.

"I shouldn't have told her," the FBI man said.

Howard Wilson shrugged.

"But why are you so sure eye color's the signal?"

Howard Wilson said, "The chances are a thousand to one, maybe a hundred times that, in favor of any given baby being normal. It won't do any good to worry."

"But you're sure eye color *is* right?"

"No," Howard Wilson said. "All we know is that the incidence of mutation is low, indicating a recessive gene. Since it's consistent, it must be the same gene. We hope it's connected to some exterior hereditary feature. Skin color, for instance, is connected with susceptibility to malaria and tuberculosis; but on the other hand, the recessive that can be mutated to cause hemophilia doesn't seem to be linked to any observable characteristic. Too few cases have been investigated to say definitely that eye color is the indication. It could just be coincidence, so far."

Hurt, the FBI man said nothing.

"I'm sorry," Howard Wilson said less sharply. He wanted to say something helpful, but he was exhausted, and the almost-thought was buzzing again in his telepathic sense. "Don't worry, that's all I can say. Don't worry. It won't do any good to worry about it."

Upon leaving the Federal Building, as he stepped into the sunshine of the street, he met his fellow telepath.

"Hey, Bob!"

Robert Edd turned. His face was drawn and his eyes were dull, as if he had been a long time without sleep. "Oh, Wilson."

Staring into his face, Howard Wilson felt sudden fear. "What's wrong?"

"Here. Read this." Robert Edd handed across a sheaf of papers.

Howard Wilson took them. His mouth was dry. "Listen, Bob, I've . . . that is . . . Have *you* noticed anything wrong? I've had an awful headache since about noon, and I keep getting blurred thoughts that I can't shut out, and . . . it hurts; my telepathic organ . . ."

"Don't think to me!" Robert Edd snapped when Howard Wilson started to abandon speech.

"OK, OK, if you want it this way," Howard Wilson said. "But listen,

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Bob, I'm scared as hell. What do you think causes it?" He could not bring himself to ask: Am I about to die? He was afraid to find out the answer.

Robert Edd had perspiration on his upper lip. He opened his mouth to speak.

Howard Wilson felt the high, shrill, unpleasant buzzing again: sharper, more menacing now, like the pang of a toothache. It made him shudder even in the heat. And Robert Edd's eyes were suddenly no longer dull; had this piercing buzz reached him too?

"My God," Robert Edd whispered. "No time to talk. Phone me later." He turned and half ran up the stairs.

"Wait!" Howard Wilson called. But Robert Edd had already disappeared. Howard Wilson stared after him indecisively. Then he looked down at the sheaf of papers. An autopsy report. He breathed easier: it concerned the new mutants. He had been afraid . . . No, he did not want to talk to Robert Edd just now. He didn't feel like running down another, probably false, lead this afternoon.

He crossed to his car, and sitting behind the wheel, he scanned the report listlessly.

The birth had been typical. As always, the mother had died — this time in spite of a Cæsarian section. The mutant, as usual, gave every indication of being premature — as if the normal gestation period had been too short.

It had died within minutes of the mother. The autopsy showed that its heart was slightly larger than normal, containing an extra compartment; the gonads were undescended, which would probably have resulted in sterility if the creature had reached maturity; the adrenal cortex was completely separated and displaced backward on the kidney; the appendix was missing, and several other vestigial organs atrophied; the glands, notably the pituitary and thyroid were considerably extended; there was some rearrangement of other organs, and the stomach was much smaller and more heavily lined than normal.

There seemed to be a tiny, extra (perhaps potentially telepathic) brain segment between the medulla oblongata and the spinal column proper, and the two halves of the brain were more nearly joined. The nervous system was quite complex. The bone structure had shortened; the normal number of ribs diminished by two. And the underskin, heavy with fatty stored food deposits, practically concentrated body sugar. The body temperature had been abnormally low.

When he finished with the report, he leaned back and closed his eyes. He felt a moment of kinship with the poor dead thing. Then he felt vaguely uneasy. He ran his tongue over dry lips. Why had Robert Edd wanted him to read the report?

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He started to get out of the car.

Suddenly the headache was worse, and he felt listless. His mind was overburdened with a sense of futility. Quietly, from a thousand hospitals, the reports were coming in. What could anyone do about it?

Even if eye color proved to be linked to the infected genes — could the government prevent the breeding of the suspects? What would happen when the government announced the mutant wave? Might that not be the international spark? Daily the balance became more uncertain, and critical Europe wavered in loyalty, needing only a push into confusion for which, confidently, the Stalinists waited. Anti-Bomb hysteria could mushroom over night as world citizens seeking an explanation, even as rulers, pointed to America's recent Alaska tests.

He was all at once disgusted with humanity.

But even as the disgust came, there came also the kinship. Even as he wanted to say, Their battles are not my battles, he knew that they were.

For once in Italy on one of the quiet missions, this time to assassinate a key figure and culminate a Titoist break with Moscow — a mission that, through miscalculation, failed — he had met one of his kind in opposition, and as he faced the alien telepath, he knew no common ties with him. They were from different worlds, human worlds, to which they had somehow, beyond their intentions, become committed. Howard Wilson had killed the alien telepath, and he could not feel remorse; for the telepath had been religiously certain of destiny, a certainty which, for Howard Wilson, was presumptuous and frighteningly dangerous.

To hell with it, he thought. I'm going to die.

It was in words at last.

I'm going to die, he thought sadly. He thought about a warm spring night when he was in high school, and he remembered a fish fry when he was six years old. What does anything matter? he thought. I wonder how soon it will be? He wanted to cry. He hated the thing on his forehead that had begun to pain. How soon? The doctor had said, "The pain will be toward the end."

He wanted to be alone with his black despair.

He started the motor. He shifted the gears.

Slowly he drove back the way he had come. Why must I and those poor dead things being born daily be persecuted by the seeds of our difference? he thought. It isn't fair.

At the city limits, he felt wave after wave of peace and strength and power and satisfaction. He stared fascinated at the cemetery. And suddenly death seemed almost pleasant. To rest in the cool, sweet earth . . .

His telepathic organ quivered. There was no longer pain, but increasing

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awareness. He frowned again, almost . . . what? The no longer pain whisked away and was gone. In its wake came new restfulness; he felt calmer than he had all day.

As he was getting out of his car before his house, he felt thoughts flow upon his mind and twist away before he could trap them.

His hands were moist. He half ran to the front room. He had to phone Robert Edd. He suddenly realized the significance of the autopsy report.

The phone was ringing.

"Wilson? Wilson, you all right?" the voice asked when he picked up the receiver.

"I'm all right," he said.

"Thank God! This is Kenny at the office. Listen. Robert Edd is dead. He dropped dead right at the door just after you left."

". . . no," Howard Wilson said dully.

"And we just got a teletype. Half the other telepaths have died in the last twenty-four hours."

The phone was cold in Howard Wilson's hand.

"Sit tight. I'm bringing a doctor right over to examine you. Don't move."

"I won't," he said. His forehead was throbbing. "Listen, Kenny, for God's sake, listen!"

Kenny had hung up.

Howard Wilson rattled the receiver hook. "Operator! Operator!" he cried. His hands were shaking desperately.

His head buzzed shriller and shriller, and suddenly he was listening, terrified, to thoughts he did not want to hear. Icy, cold, ruthless, alien. For which he could never feel any emotion but fear and revulsion.

He had to tell the operator before it was too late. "*Operator!*" he screamed.

"Did you get him?" the thought came, or the meaning came, for it was not in words.

"Yes," in answer.

"Good. We can't afford to have them find out. Yet."

"He had just broken through."

"Good."

"Good."

"Good."

Howard Wilson could feel the circuits begin to open up from around the world. Howard Wilson remembered what they looked like, remembered the only one he had seen, a female, lying in an antiseptic room in Christ's Hospital. He began to cry in terror.

"I'm being cremated," came a shriek of agony from India, and then the mind behind it died.

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"Hello! Hello! Hello!" Howard Wilson screamed into the telephone.

"I've stopped heart action to join you," came the thought from England.

"Listen!" Howard Wilson cried into the receiver.

"Another one's broke through! Stop him!" came the thought.

Howard Wilson felt his brain being ripped and shredded. His eyes went blank, and his body, unfeeling, fell to the floor, and the mutant thoughts gouged and tore at his mind.

"Hello? Hello?" said the operator.

"I had to regrow three organs after that autopsy," came a mutant thought.

"How long now?"

"Let's count."

And the responses began to roll in from America, Europe, Asia, minds counting one after the other.

"It won't be long now, at the rate we're going."

"But we can wait many years if we must."

Howard Wilson could feel nothing, and his consciousness was dripping away to icy laughter.

"A long time."

"Until there are enough of us."

"Wait. . . ."

"And grow strong . . ."

"And grow numerous . . ."

"In France, China, Germany, Russia, Japan, Ireland, Italy, Australia, Brazil . . ."

"Let us rest and grow."

Howard Wilson was almost dead now. The operator kept saying, "What did you want?"

"In our secret tombs . . ."

"In the soft, soft earth . . ."

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Recommended Reading

by THE EDITORS

A PRODIGIOUS number of science fiction books have been announced for 1952; but most of them are scheduled for late Spring at the earliest. At the time this column is being prepared, in mid-January, only one science fiction book has been formally released to reviewers (as contrasted with 25 in the analogous field of crime-suspense fiction!). Which gives us a welcome opportunity to catch up on 1951 titles received too late for our annual survey.

One of these should certainly have appeared on our "Best of 1951" list: Lewis Padgett's TOMORROW AND TOMORROW and THE FAIRY CHESSMEN (Gnome). Padgett's virtues of literary style, lively characterization, adroitly melodramatic plotting, and extraordinarily plausible off-beat logic are too widely recognized to need any further push from us. The first of these two short novels is competent enough, but routine in concept and execution; the second is Padgett *in excelsis* — a magnificent development of the Carrollian concept of variable "truths" which stands, whether as stirring fiction or as a stimulating intellectual exercise, among the finest modern science fiction.

Hardly for an annual "Best" list, but of marked imaginative interest is Peter Lum's FABULOUS BEASTS (Pantheon). Lum's text could benefit by the logical sense of organization of such a science fiction writer as Padgett; but he has collected a fascinating, if chaotic, amount of information on the beasts of man's legendary imaginings (and perhaps occasional memories?). He writes simply and well; and Anne Marie Jauss's line-drawings, from countless out-of-the-way sources, are a pure joy.

A few of 1951's non-fantasy books contain enough material of and for the imagination to please an F&SF reader: B. A. Botkin's A TREASURY OF WESTERN FOLKLORE (Crown) not only is a splendid compendium of factual reporting on all aspects of our Western culture, but includes a section as long as many separate books on the tall tales and fantasies of Western storytellers, both Indian and white. Paul Jensen's THE FIRESIDE BOOK OF FLYING STORIES (Simon & Schuster) is of marked science fiction interest even in its realistic aspects, as portraying the human and psychological side of the development of a revolutionary technology; almost a third of its wordage, moreover, is devoted to imaginative fiction — none of it unfamiliar, but all of the highest grade.

In the first small wave of 1952's promised inundation of anthologies we can recommend THE ASTOUNDING SCIENCE FICTION ANTHOLOGY, edited by

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John W. Campbell, Jr. (Simon & Schuster), an intriguing assortment, as much so for its omissions as for its inclusions. By no means the best from that magazine, nor the least-familiar-but-awfully-good, the collection still contains enough good things to make it very pleasant reading. There is no doubt that Mr. Campbell's editorial policies and judgments were a major factor in making science fiction what it is today; one wishes, therefore, that he had been the first to anthologize from his magazine, rather than the twenty-first. So many anthologies of science fiction have been done to date that we contend it's all but impossible to assemble one of stories that are unfamiliar but good. We're afraid that Martin Greenberg's TRAVELERS OF SPACE (Gnome) gives validity to our argument. And we're even more afraid that it's the shape of things to come this year! Three stories included therein edge it on the "recommended" list; the rest of the book is less than mediocre.

Present activity in the field of inexpensive reprints is very pleasant (and reassuring) to behold. The re-issue of Olaf Stapledon's classic of *homo superior*, ODD JOHN (Galaxy) will assuredly meet with a rousing welcome, although one could wish the type were easier to read. In its ten cent series Dell has brought us another classic of science fiction, Robert A. Heinlein's UNIVERSE, with an introduction too good to be anonymous. Rounding out a top-flight trio is Guy Endore's WEREWOLF OF PARIS (Avon), that superb blend of fantasy and psycho-pathology and history that is definitely not for the squeamish. Of lesser rank, but worth noting, is FPCI's reprinting of some of their earlier publications in paper backs at $1.50 each. While editorial taste is uneven, the general reader will want WORLDS OF WONDER, by Olaf Stapledon, and, although it's a severe disappointment from an important writer, students of the field will find Stanley G. Weinbaum's THE DARK OTHER of some interest. Signet has reprinted A. E. Van Vogt's VOYAGE OF THE SPACE BEAGLE under the better title of MISSION: INTERPLANETARY.

Note to collectors and enthusiasts: The San Diego Science-Fantasy Society has wisely decided to issue a series of booklets on individual authors rather than an amateur magazine. The first of these, RAY BRADBURY REVIEW, displays much too much uncritical ecstasy, but contains valuable biographical material (largely from Bradbury himself) and a complete bibliography. Admirers of one of the best of the younger talents — in any field — will find this a welcome reference work now — and a valuable collector's item in the future. Copies may be ordered (at 50¢ each) from the editor, William F. Nolan, 4458 56th St., San Diego, California.

A recent publication obviously not to be reviewed in this column is THE BEST FROM FANTASY & SCIENCE FICTION, edited by Anthony Boucher and J. Francis McComas (Little, Brown), a selection of never-anthologized stories from the first two volumes (1949–1951) of this magazine's existence.

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Mr. Lynch describes himself as twenty-seven, single and ready to start work as a schoolteacher. In this, his first published story, he also shows that he's a young man who can handle pleasantly odd ideas with professional ease and agility. About the only way we can describe his study of various art forms is to say that it proves once again the validity of the old cliché, truth is stranger than fiction.

Artists at Work

by HAROLD LYNCH, JR

TOBY CHASE happened to encounter his friend Smith just at the door of the little watch-repair shop, so he accompanied him inside. It was early Saturday evening, and the two young men found Herr Stumpf, the proprietor, bent over his radio, listening to the symphony.

"My watch has stopped dead, Herr Stumpf," said Smith, handing over his wrist watch. The orchestra was playing something by Sibelius.

Herr Stumpf took the timepiece in his big, meaty hands and peered at it through his thick-lensed spectacles. "It is probably the spring broken," he said heavily. His hands shook with age as he put the watch behind him on a table. "I think it will be ready Monday, if I do not have to send out for a part."

"Watch-repair is a delicate business," said young Toby, meaning that he wondered how an old man, half blind, with hands that shook so, could manage it.

"Ach, so delicate, yes," said Herr Stumpf, smiling a little. "I myself do nothing any more. I leave it all to my assistants."

Toby nodded, but Smith looked a little puzzled, as he had never seen anyone but Herr Stumpf in the shop.

"I have grown too old for the work," Herr Stumpf continued. "Now I let my helpers find what is wrong and remove the broken parts. Then I give them new ones and they put them in. I do nothing but direct the work, and I don't even do much of that any more. Ach, listen, listen!" He meant the Sibelius. "You know, the Finn is the only great one we have left. He makes music — the others make noises only!"

They fell to discussing modern composers, of whom Herr Stumpf had generally a low opinion.

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"They think the orchestra not good enough," he growled. "They must compose for rattles and dishpans. Such nonsense they call music!" Smith took all this sort of thing very seriously, and undertook to defend modern musical trends.

"All they're trying to do is find new sources of musical experience!" he said rather heatedly. He and Herr Stumpf argued the merits of several modern composers while the orchestra finished the Sibelius and went on to Brahms, and Toby listened thoughtfully. He himself knew little of music, yet he was appreciative of all forms of esthetic creation, and in his own sphere he was a genuine artist. His own sphere was lying.

Young Toby Chase was not a liar for monetary gain, for he was wealthy, nor for personal aggrandizement, for he seldom spoke of himself. His lying was for pure love of the noble art, and he was quite hurt when his friends suggested otherwise. He was not always appreciated.

"Squealing like pigs is no music!" he heard Herr Stumpf insist.

"Herr Stumpf, music can't stand still!" said Smith. "Composers must continually strive to broaden our musical horizons!"

"Well, I don't know —" Toby said at last. "You remember what happened to Bernini."

Smith and Herr Stumpf looked at him.

"You recall Bernini, of course," said Toby to Herr Stumpf. He knew, of course, that Herr Stumpf could not possibly recall Bernini.

"He was an Italian, maybe —" said Herr Stumpf vaguely, and the artist knew he had his man.

"Bernini was of Italian parentage, but was born, I believe, in Austria or Bavaria," Toby replied, making a shrewd guess at Herr Stumpf's own origin. "Twenty-five years ago he was one of Europe's great conductors. You surely recall *Bernini!*"

"I think once, in Salzburg —" Herr Stumpf began.

"Of course!" said Toby with a great smile. "He was one of the Festival conductors! As you remember, he was not only a leading conductor, but a composer, a daring composer who often experimented with musical innovation. But, of course, always with a sense of beauty and taste we don't find among *today's* so-called composers!"

"Ach, so. As I have said, today's composers —"

"If his life had not been cut so tragically short," said Toby solemnly, "I feel sure he would have taken his place with music's greatest."

"What'd he die of?" asked Smith, getting into the spirit of the thing.

"Herr Stumpf undoubtedly remembers the circumstances much better than I," said Toby. "After all, I was quite young at the time —"

But Herr Stumpf, it developed, could remember nothing of Bernini at all.

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"It was right after his success with his Starling Sonata," explained Toby, looking mildly shocked at Herr Stumpf, "that Bernini conceived the project which led to his terrible death. The Starling Sonata has been transcribed for solo flute, but of course that's not the way it was originally scored. Bernini heard a starling twittering outside his window one morning and, struck by the beautiful simplicity of the bird's call, sat down immediately and composed the sonata based upon that simple melody. An ordinary musician would have been satisfied with that, but Bernini was neither an ordinary musician nor an ordinary man."

The artist paused for effect, but neither Smith nor Herr Stumpf said anything. They were both trying to remember what starlings sounded like.

"He searched Europe for two years until he found a starling that could be trained to respond to his baton," Toby continued. "At last, after rejecting thousands, he found his feathered prodigy, trained it, and conducted several brilliant performances. The Starling Sonata brought all Europe to Bernini's feet, but he, of course, remained unsatisfied. This, he told friends, was nothing, nothing at all. In a sense, he felt, any vaudeville performer with a pair of trained canaries was his equal. It was then that his magnificent imagination conceived the idea that led to his downfall."

The orchestra began the third movement of the Brahms.

"Bernini dropped out of sight, and for months no one knew what he was doing, although he had previously announced a new and extremely unusual composition. The wildest sort of stories were heard. In every musical gathering no one even listened to what was being played; there were so many fascinating rumors to be heard about Bernini. In Stockholm they insisted that he had composed an opera to be sung entirely by starlings and crows, in London they insisted it was a ballet for fish. Paris brought forth the claim that he had contacted the other world with the aid of spiritualists, and had composed a chorale to be sung by the dead; Rome indignantly denied this nonsense and offered in its stead the ingenious idea that Bernini had composed a cantata to be made up entirely of the first cries of new-born infants. How the chorus was to be auditioned and rehearsed was not explained.

"Although the theory which emanated from Prague turned out to be untrue as regards Bernini's plans, it offers intriguing possibilities. It was said by the Czechs that Bernini had designed a concert hall so constructed acoustically that one needed but to sound a single note with the voice or any musical instrument, and echoes immediately created a melody and continued for an hour or so to play symphonic variations on it. A music critic from Berlin challenged another from Vienna over their conflicting notions of what Bernini was about, and though they were both of them

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extremely poor marksmen they succeeded in killing each other before it could be learned what either of their theories was. One of them might have stumbled upon the truth, although it seems unlikely to me. There was a poor fellow in Budapest who was very sure that Bernini was working on a 'symphony of silences,' to be made up of variations upon the absences of sounds; when he found out he was wrong he undertook to rectify Bernini's omission by composing it himself. At length he had to be forcibly put away in very quiet surroundings where he lived for years listening in vain for new kinds of soundlessness."

"Ach, but what *was* Bernini doing?" asked Herr Stumpf, his eyes bulging behind his thick-lensed spectacles.

"Well, no one knew where he was, either, so they couldn't very well ask him," Toby went on imperturbably. "After about a year of the wildest speculation Meyer, Bernini's manager, turned up in Paris. At first he wouldn't talk, but one night a gang of students took him over to Montmartre and got him thoroughly drunk, and then, of course, the secret was out."

Young Mr. Chase seemed to take a sudden interest in the Brahms. He listened a moment, swaying his head from side to side appreciatively. Suddenly, however, he noticed a dangerous look in Smith's eye and decided it would be safest to get on with the story.

"The new Bernini composition was at once a much simpler and a much more imaginative thing than all the rumors had suggested. The Bernini opus, to be conducted, of course, by its composer, was a symphony for orchestra and bees."

"Bees?" cried Herr Stumpf.

"*Bees!*" said Smith in a very high voice.

"Bees," said Toby placidly, peering solemnly down his long nose. "The humming of bees has long been a source of musical inspiration; several well-known compositions are named after this melodious insect. Bernini, who had made a musical instrument of a starling, now proposed to enlist bees as a part of a symphonic orchestra. The composition itself was his masterpiece; several critics have compared it to the works of Beethoven. The problems involved in its performance were tremendous, and only a genius like Bernini could have managed it at all."

"But, how —? How —?" sputtered Herr Stumpf.

"Bernini of course studied the ways of bees exhaustively. Before long he had become the outstanding hymenopterist of his day. Bees, he quickly learned, are dependent upon scent, not only for their knowledge of the world, for locations of flowers, dangers, and their own hive, but for their adjustment to the complex social structure of the colony. Bees distinguish

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between friend and foe, and between different classes of their own kind, entirely by scent. It is by her sense of smell that a bee recognizes a fellow-worker, and tells her from strangers, from drones, queens, or larvæ. And thus, Bernini learned, bees further learn to associate various emotions with differing scent-stimuli, and respond or keep silent as they perceive varied scent-patterns."

Herr Stumpf looked as though he did not understand exactly what the young gentleman was talking about.

"He had some devilishly clever Bavarian craftsmen make him a special baton. It contained a number of very thin hollow chambers, opening at the tip and controlled at the base by a tiny vial. A group of Florentine chemists made him a number of special gases which were confined under pressure in the chambers. Bernini could thus release his gases from his baton while conducting, and, as you have guessed, these gases were scents causing varied reactions in bees.

"He had agents all over the world bringing him swarms of the creatures. The expense, of course, was enormous, and the resources of Bernini's numerous wealthy patrons were strained to their limits. Bernini took each group of bees as they came in and auditioned them personally, then, with the aid of his marvellous scent-baton, began painstakingly training the best. This went on for about six months, then he called in his orchestra and went into rehearsals. His musicians — that is, his *human* ones — say that he was like a madman as the premiere drew near. The final rehearsals, they say, were utterly nerve-wracking — and utterly magnificent. The Symphony for Orchestra and Bees was given its premiere at Nice, in the height of the season. Unfortunately its premiere was also its last performance. The symphony has never been performed anywhere since.

"On the night of the performance, excitement was at fever pitch. Everyone in Europe of any musical prominence had been invited, of course, and the streets outside the open-air auditorium were thronged with musicians, music-lovers, and the merely curious. The new composition was the only thing on the program. As the audience entered they noticed huge screens mounted about six feet above the stage, directly over the violins on the one side and the cellos on the other. In a short while the musicians came in, took their seats, and began to tune up, and as they did so little groups of bees flew quietly in from the wings and swarmed upon the screens until they were covered with hundreds upon hundreds of the tiny insects. Then Bernini appeared and walked quietly out to the podium.

"The applause was deafening, and the entire audience rose to its feet in tribute to the man's genius. They say he bowed once, modestly, and then turned and called the orchestra to attention. He waited until he got ab-

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solute silence, then he raised his baton and vigorously began conducting.

"You know that thing of Bach's that goes da-dada-*da*-da? Well, they say his opening theme was very like that, and he had got a swarm of African bumblebees, all deep basses, and at first they hummed the theme alone. Da-dada-*da*-da! Then, very quietly at first, the violins took it up, and began a sprightly duet with a swarm of Spanish soprano honeybees. After that the woodwinds came in, and the theme moved back and forth between the deep rumble of the African bumblebees and the strings and honeybees, until at last the brasses came in, the rest of the bees joined those already humming, and the first movement was concluded.

"The second movement was more plaintive, and included a solo passage for a bee. I suppose it was a queen, but no one ever found out for sure. This movement also included a charming series of passages by the English horns and Scottish contralto bees, the theme of which was supposed to have been borrowed by Korsbatski as the main theme of his second, or Heather concerto, composed several years afterwards.

"The third movement, featuring the entire company of bees, was universally conceded to have been the best. It was a triumph of mellifluity, singing of green fields, covered with pollen-laden flowers, and of the sweet nectar drawn from them. The music sang of hives in many lands, and of dreams of golden harvests of honey. It sang of many things human beings never know, but things which stand for life and love and beauty to a bee. It sang of summer afternoons in the lives of those whose whole lives are one brief summer long.

"The fourth movement began with the deep bass statement of the opening, and developed it this time as an angry, martial challenge. There was, I understand, a lot of strident melody from the brasses, with the kettledrums rumbling in the rear, and a slowly swelling warning from the bees. They began a kind of growl, louder and louder, calling of danger to the hives, of storm and trouble, drawing steadily nearer, and growing steadily more terrifying. The music moved rapidly to a climax, recounting all the earlier themes in a harsh, dramatic march to war. At last they came to the final chords of the Symphony for Orchestra and Bees, and even the members of the orchestra did not guess what was coming next, for Bernini had never rehearsed the final chord.

"He raised his baton high above his head, and as he did so all the bees rose from the screens and hovered over him in a great dark cloud. I suppose he must have known what he was doing and was prepared to pay the price. In that last moment of his symphony he must have released a scent-signal from his marvellous baton that was the very quintessence of challenge and terror, for the audience heard a great chord from that cloud that expressed

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the supremacy of vengeance, and the bees swarmed down upon Bernini.

"They stung him to death in an instant; there was no way to stop them, of course. Then, while the audience sat in stunned silence, the bees arose and flew rapidly off. No one ever saw them again. That was the first, last, and only performance of Bernini's Symphony for Orchestra and Bees."

"*Gott Im Himmel!*" gasped Herr Stumpf weakly. He wiped his forehead with his handkerchief.

"Why did you want to fill that poor old man full of such nonsense?" asked Smith as he and the liar walked down the street.

"His life is so dull," young Toby replied, grinning smugly. "I decided to give him something to think about. If you didn't like it why didn't you stop me?"

Back in the shop Herr Stumpf still trembled as he removed the band from Smith's wrist watch. He pried the back of the case off and peered owlishly into the mechanism.

"It is a wheel broken, I think," he murmured, carrying the watch into his little back room. "A symphony of bees! *Wunderbar!*"

He set the watch face down in the center of a large container, and switched on the light just above it. Almost at once a slim black line wound its way from a corner over to the watch. A dark mass poured over and into the mechanism.

"A symphony of bees!" the old man said again, awed, then smiled down at his helpers.

For in only a few seconds the ants had located and removed the broken wheel.

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Her fellow craftsmen of the detective story have stated both publicly and privately that Miss Christie possesses the most brilliant imagination of them all. In this story of a man and a god, each of whom had to sacrifice some part of himself to achieve perfect wholeness, she demonstrates that that same shining talent is manifest in her occasional ventures into imaginative writing. (A pity these are so few!) We feel that this reprint from a collection of her short stories, THE HOUND OF DEATH AND OTHER STORIES *(London: Odhams, 1933), offers Agatha Christie's fantasy thinking and writing at its superlative best.*

The Call of Wings

by AGATHA CHRISTIE

SILAS HAMER heard it first on a wintry night in February. He and Dick Borrow had walked from a dinner given by Bernard Selden, the nerve specialist. Borrow had been unusually silent, and Silas Hamer asked him with some curiosity what he was thinking about. Borrow's answer was unexpected.

"I was thinking, that of all these men to-night, only two amongst them could lay claim to happiness. And that these two, strangely enough, were you and I!"

The word "strangely" was apposite, for no two men could be more dissimilar than Richard Borrow, the hard-working east-end parson, and Silas Hamer, the sleek complacent man whose millions were a matter of household knowledge.

"It's odd, you know," mused Borrow, "I believe you're the only contented millionaire I've ever met."

Hamer was silent a moment. When he spoke his tone had altered.

"I used to be a wretched shivering little newspaper boy. I wanted then — what I've got now! — the comfort and the luxury of money, not its power. I wanted money, not to wield as a force, but to spend lavishly — on myself! I'm frank about it, you see. Money can't buy everything, they say. Very true. But it can buy everything I want — therefore I'm satisfied. I'm a materialist, Borrow, out and out a materialist!"

The broad glare of the lighted thoroughfare confirmed this confession of faith. The sleek lines of Silas Hamer's body were amplified by the heavy

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fur-lined coat, and the white light emphasised the thick rolls of flesh beneath his chin. In contrast to him walked Dick Borrow, with the thin ascetic face and the star-gazing fanatical eyes.

"It's *you*," said Hamer with emphasis, "that I can't understand."

Borrow smiled.

"I live in the midst of misery, want, starvation — all the ills of the flesh! And a predominant Vision upholds me. It's not easy to understand unless you believe in Visions, which I gather you don't."

"I don't believe," said Silas Hamer stolidly, "in anything I can't see and hear and touch."

"Quite so. That's the difference between us. Well, good-bye, the earth now swallows me up!"

They had reached the doorway of a lighted Tube station, which was Borrow's route home.

Hamer proceeded alone. He was glad he had sent away the car to-night and elected to walk home. The air was keen and frosty, his senses were delightfully conscious of the enveloping warmth of the fur-lined coat.

He paused for an instant on the curbstone before crossing the road. A great motor 'bus was heavily ploughing its way towards him. Hamer, with the feeling of infinite leisure, waited for it to pass. If he were to cross in front of it he would have to hurry — and hurry was distasteful to him.

By his side a battered derelict of the human race rolled drunkenly off the pavement. Hamer was aware of a shout, an ineffectual swerve of the motor 'bus, and then — he was looking stupidly, with a gradually awakening horror, at a limp inert heap of rags in the middle of the road.

A crowd gathered magically, with a couple of policemen and the 'bus driver as its nucleus. But Hamer's eyes were riveted in horrified fascination on that lifeless bundle that had once been a man — a man like himself!

"Dahn't yer blime yerself, guv'nor," remarked a rough-looking man at his side. "Yer couldn't 'a done nothin'. 'E was done for anyways."

Hamer stared at him. The idea that it was possible in any way to save the man had quite honestly never occurred to him. He scouted the notion now as an absurdity. Why, if he had been so foolish, he might at this moment . . . His thoughts broke off abruptly, and he walked away from the crowd. He felt himself shaking with a nameless unquenchable dread. He was forced to admit to himself that he was *afraid* — horribly afraid — of Death. . . . Death that came with dreadful swiftness and remorseless certainty to rich and poor alike. . . .

He walked faster, but the new fear was still with him, enveloping him in its cold and chilling grasp.

He wondered at himself, for he knew that by nature he was no coward.

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Five years ago, he reflected, this fear would not have attacked him. For then Life had not been so sweet. . . . Yes, that was it; love of Life was the key to the mystery. The zest of living was at its height for him; it knew but one menace, Death, the destroyer!

He turned out of the lighted thoroughfare. A narrow passageway, between high walls, offered a short-cut to the Square where his house, famous for its art treasures, was situated.

The noise of the streets behind him lessened and faded, the soft thud of his own footsteps was the only sound to be heard.

And then out of the gloom in front of him came another sound. Sitting against the wall was a man playing the flute. One of the enormous tribe of street musicians, of course, but why had he chosen such a peculiar spot? Surely at this time of night the police —— Hamer's reflections were interrupted suddenly as he realised with a shock that the man had no legs. A pair of crutches rested against the wall beside him. Hamer saw now that it was not a flute he was playing but a strange instrument whose notes were much higher and clearer than those of a flute.

The man played on. He took no notice of Hamer's approach. His head was flung far back on his shoulders, as though uplifted in the joy of his own music, and the notes poured out clearly and joyously, rising higher and higher. . . .

It was a strange tune — strictly speaking, it was not a tune at all, but a single phrase, not unlike the slow turn given out by the violins of *Rienzi*, repeated again and again, passing from key to key, from harmony to harmony, but always rising and attaining each time to a greater and more boundless freedom.

It was unlike anything Hamer had ever heard. There was something strange about it, something inspiring — and uplifting . . . it . . . He caught frantically with both hands to a projection in the wall beside him. He was conscious of one thing only — *that he must keep down* — at all costs he must *keep down*. . . .

He suddenly realised that the music had stopped. The legless man was reaching out for his crutches. And here was he, Silas Hamer, clutching like a lunatic at a stone buttress, for the simple reason that he had had the utterly preposterous notion — absurd on the face of it! — that he was rising from the ground — that the music was carrying him upwards. . . .

He laughed. What a wholly mad idea! Of course his feet had never left the earth for a moment, but what a strange hallucination! The quick tap-tapping of wood on the pavement told him that the cripple was moving away. He looked after him until the man's figure was swallowed up in the gloom. An odd fellow!

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He proceeded on his way more slowly; he could not efface from his mind the memory of that strange impossible sensation when the ground had failed beneath his feet. . . .

And then on an impulse he turned and followed hurriedly in the direction the other had taken. The man could not have gone far — he would soon overtake him.

He shouted as soon as he caught sight of the maimed figure swinging itself slowly along.

"Hi! One minute."

The man stopped and stood motionless until Hamer came abreast of him. A lamp burned just over his head and revealed every feature. Silas Hamer caught his breath in involuntary surprise. The man possessed the most singularly beautiful head he had ever seen. He might have been any age; assuredly he was not a boy, yet youth was the most predominant characteristic — youth and vigour in passionate intensity!

Hamer found an odd difficulty in beginning his conversation.

"Look here," he said awkwardly, "I want to know — what was that thing you were playing just now?"

The man smiled. . . . With his smile the world seemed suddenly to leap into joyousness. . . .

"It was an old tune — a very old tune. . . . Years old — centuries old."

He spoke with an odd purity and distinctness of enunciation, giving equal value to each syllable. He was clearly not an Englishman, yet Hamer was puzzled as to his nationality.

"You're not English? Where do you come from?" Again the broad joyful smile.

"From over the sea, sir. I came — a long time ago — a very long time ago."

"You must have had a bad accident. Was it lately?"

"Some time now, sir."

"Rough luck to lose both legs."

"It was well," said the man very calmly. He turned his eyes with a strange solemnity on his interlocutor. "They were evil."

Hamer dropped a shilling in his hand and turned away. He was puzzled and vaguely disquieted. "They were evil!" What a strange thing to say! Evidently an operation for some form of disease, but — how odd it had sounded.

Hamer went home thoughtful. He tried in vain to dismiss the incident from his mind. Lying in bed, with the first incipient sensation of drowsiness stealing over him, he heard a neighbouring clock strike one. One clear

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stroke and then silence — silence that was broken by a faint familiar sound. . . . Recognition came leaping. Hamer felt his heart beating quickly. It was the man in the passageway playing, somewhere not far distant. . . .

The notes came gladly, the slow turn with its joyful call, the same haunting little phrase. . . . "It's uncanny," murmured Hamer, "it's uncanny. It's got wings to it. . . ."

Clearer and clearer, higher and higher — each wave rising above the last, and catching *him* up with it. This time he did not struggle, he let himself go. . . . Up — up. . . . The waves of sound were carrying him higher and higher. . . . Triumphant and free, they swept on.

Higher and higher. . . . They had passed the limits of human sound now, but they still continued — rising, ever rising. . . . Would they reach the final goal, the full perfection of height?

Rising. . . .

Something was pulling — pulling him downwards. Something big and heavy and insistent. It pulled remorselessly — pulled him back, and down . . . down. . . .

He lay in bed gazing at the window opposite. Then, breathing heavily and painfully, he stretched an arm out of bed. The movement seemed curiously cumbrous to him. The softness of the bed was oppressive, oppressive too were the heavy curtains over the window that blocked out light and air. The ceiling seemed to press down upon him. He felt stifled and choked. He moved slightly under the clothes, and the weight of his body seemed to him the most oppressive thing of all. . . .

"I want your advice, Seldon."

Seldon pushed back his chair an inch or so from the table. He had been wondering what was the object of this tête-à-tête dinner. He had seen little of Hamer since the winter, and he was aware to-night of some indefinable change in his friend.

"It's just this," said the millionaire. "I'm worried about myself."

Seldon smiled as he looked across the table.

"You're looking in the pink of condition."

"It's not that." Hamer paused a minute, then added quietly, "I'm afraid I'm going mad."

The nerve specialist glanced up with a sudden keen interest. He poured himself out a glass of port with a rather slow movement, and then said quietly, but with a sharp glance at the other man: "What makes you think that?"

"Something that's happened to me. Something inexplicable, unbelievable. It can't be true, so I must be going mad."

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"Take your time," said Seldon, "and tell me about it."

"I don't believe in the supernatural," began Hamer. "I never have. But this thing . . . Well, I'd better tell you the whole story from the beginning. It began last winter one evening after I had dined with you."

Then briefly and concisely he narrated the events of his walk home and the strange sequel.

"That was the beginning of it all. I can't explain it to you properly — the feeling, I mean — but it was wonderful! Unlike anything I've ever felt or dreamed. Well, it's gone on ever since. Not every night, just now and then. The music, the feeling of being uplifted, the soaring flight . . . and then the terrible drag, the pull back to earth, and afterwards the pain, the actual physical pain of the awakening. It's like coming down from a high mountain — you know the pains in the ears one gets? Well, this is the same thing, but intensified — and with it goes the awful sense of *weight* — of being hemmed in, stifled. . . ."

He broke off and there was a pause.

"Already the servants think I'm mad. I couldn't bear the roof and the walls — I've had a place arranged up at the top of the house, open to the sky, with no furniture or carpets, or any stifling things. . . . But even then the houses all round are nearly as bad. It's open country I want, somewhere where one can breathe. . . ." He looked across at Seldon. "Well, what do you say? Can you explain it?"

"H'm," said Seldon. "Plenty of explanations. You've been hypnotised, or you've hypnotised yourself. Your nerves have gone wrong. Or it may be merely a dream."

Hamer shook his head. "None of those explanations will do."

"And there are others," said Seldon slowly, "but they're not generally admitted."

"*You* are prepared to admit them?"

"On the whole, yes! There's a great deal we can't understand which can't possibly be explained normally. We've any amount to find out still, and I for one believe in keeping an open mind."

"What do you advise me to do?" asked Hamer after a silence.

Seldon leaned forward briskly. "One of several things. Go away from London, seek out your 'open country.' The dreams may cease."

"I can't do that," said Hamer quickly. "It's come to this that I can't do without them. I don't want to do without them."

"Ah! I guessed as much. Another alternative, find this fellow, this cripple. You're endowing him now with all sorts of supernatural attributes. Talk to him. Break the spell."

Hamer shook his head again.

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"Why not?"

"I'm afraid," said Hamer simply.

Seldon made a gesture of impatience. "Don't believe in it all so blindly! This tune now, the medium that starts it all, what is it like?"

Hamer hummed it, and Seldon listened with a puzzled frown.

"Rather like a bit out of the Overture to *Rienzi*. There *is* something uplifting about it — it has wings. But I'm not carried off the earth! Now, these flights of yours, are they all exactly the same?"

"No, no." Hamer leaned forward eagerly. "They develop. Each time I see a little more. It's difficult to explain. You see, I'm always conscious of reaching a certain point — the music carried me there — not direct, but by a succession of *waves*, each reaching higher than the last, until the highest point where one can go no further. I stay there until I'm dragged back. It isn't a place, it's more a *state*. Well, not just at first, but after a little while, I began to understand that there were other things all round me waiting until I was able to perceive them. Think of a kitten. It has eyes, but at first it can't see with them. It's blind and has to learn to see. Well, that was what it was to me. Mortal eyes and ears were no good to me, but there was something corresponding to them that hadn't yet been developed — something that wasn't *bodily* at all. And little by little that grew . . . there were sensations of light . . . then of sound . . . then of colour. . . . All very vague and unformulated. It was more the knowledge of things than seeing or hearing them. First it was light, a light that grew stronger and clearer . . . then sand, great stretches of reddish sand . . . and here and there straight long lines of water like canals ——"

Seldon drew in his breath sharply. "*Canals!* That's interesting. Go on."

"But these things didn't matter — they didn't count any longer. The real things were the things I couldn't see yet — but I heard them. . . . It was a sound like the rushing of wings . . . somehow, I can't explain why, it was glorious! There's nothing like it here. And then came another glory — *I saw them* — the Wings! Oh, Seldon, the Wings!"

"But what were they? Men — angels — birds?"

"I don't know. I couldn't see — not yet. But the colour of them! *Wing colour* — we haven't got it here — it's a wonderful colour."

"Wing colour?" repeated Seldon. "What's it like?"

Hamer flung up his hand impatiently. "How can I tell you? Explain the colour blue to a blind person! It's a colour you've never seen — Wing colour!"

"Well?"

"Well? That's all. That's as far as I've got. But each time the coming back has been worse — more painful. I can't understand that. I'm con-

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vinced my body never leaves the bed. In this place I get to I'm convinced I've got no *physical* presence. Why should it hurt so confoundedly then?"

Seldon shook his head in silence.

"It's something awful — the coming back. The *pull* of it — then the pain, pain in every limb and every nerve, and my ears feel as though they were bursting. Then everything *presses* so, the weight of it all, the dreadful sense of imprisonment. I want light, air, space — above all *space* to breathe in! And I want freedom."

"And what," asked Seldon, "of all the other things that used to mean so much to you?"

"That's the worst of it. I care for them still as much as, if not more than ever. And these things, comfort, luxury, pleasure, seem to pull opposite ways to the Wings. It's a perpetual struggle between them — and I can't see how it's going to end."

Seldon sat silent. The strange tale he had been listening to was fantastic enough in all truth. Was it all a delusion, a wild hallucination — or could it by any possibility be true? And if so, why *Hamer*, of all men . . . ? Surely the materialist, the man who loved the flesh and denied the spirit, was the last man to see the sights of another world.

Across the table Hamer watched him anxiously.

"I suppose," said Seldon slowly, "that you can only wait. Wait and see what happens."

"I can't! I tell you I can't! Your saying that shows you don't understand. It's tearing me in two, this awful struggle — this killing long-drawn-out fight between — between ——" He hesitated.

"The flesh and the spirit?" suggested Seldon.

Hamer stared heavily in front of him. "I suppose one might call it that. Anyway, it's unbearable. . . . I can't get free. . . ."

Again Bernard Seldon shook his head. He was caught up in the grip of the inexplicable. He made one more suggestion.

"If I were you," he advised, "I would get hold of that cripple."

But as he went home he muttered to himself: "*Canals* — I wonder."

Silas Hamer went out of the house the following morning with a new determination in his step. He had decided to take Seldon's advice and find the legless man. Yet inwardly he was convinced that his search would be in vain and that the man would have vanished as completely as though the earth had swallowed him up.

The dark buildings on either side of the passageway shut out the sunlight and left it dark and mysterious. Only in one place, half-way up it, there was a break in the wall, and through it there fell a shaft of golden light that

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illuminated with radiance a figure sitting on the ground. A figure — yes, it was the man!

The instrument of pipes leaned against the wall beside his crutches, and he was covering the paving stones with designs in coloured chalk. Two were completed, sylvan scenes of marvellous beauty and delicacy, swaying trees and a leaping brook that seemed alive.

And again Hamer doubted. Was this man a mere street musician, a pavement artist? Or was he something more . . .

Suddenly the millionaire's self-control broke down, and he cried fiercely and angrily: "Who are you? For God's sake, who are you?"

The man's eyes met his, smiling.

"Why don't you answer? Speak, man, speak!"

Then he noticed that the man was drawing with incredible rapidity on a bare slab of stone. Hamer followed the movement with his eyes. . . . A few bold strokes, and giant trees took form. Then, seated on a boulder . . . a man . . . playing an instrument of pipes. A man with a strangely beautiful face — *and goat's legs.* . . .

The cripple's hand made a swift movement. The man still sat on the rock, but the goat's legs were gone. Again his eyes met Hamer's.

"They were evil," he said.

Hamer stared, fascinated. For the face before him was the face of the picture, but strangely and incredibly beautified. . . . Purified from all but an intense and exquisite joy of living.

Hamer turned and almost fled down the passageway into the bright sunlight, repeating to himself incessantly: "It's impossible. Impossible. . . . I'm mad — dreaming!" But the face haunted him — the face of Pan. . . .

He went into the Park and sat on a chair. It was a deserted hour. A few nursemaids with their charges sat in the shade of the trees, and dotted here and there in the stretches of green, like islands in a sea, lay the recumbent forms of men. . . .

The words "a wretched tramp" were to Hamer an epitome of misery. But suddenly, to-day, he envied them. . . .

They seemed to him of all created beings the only free ones. The earth beneath them, the sky above them, the world to wander in . . . they were not hemmed in or chained.

Like a flash it came to him that that which bound him so remorselessly was the thing he had worshipped and prized above all others — wealth! He had thought it the strongest thing on earth, and now, wrapped round by its golden strength, he saw the truth of his words. It was his money that held him in bondage. . . .

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But was it? Was that really it? Was there a deeper and more pointed truth that he had not seen? Was it the money or was it his own love of the money? He was bound in fetters of his own making, not wealth itself, but love of wealth was the chain.

He knew now clearly the two forces that were tearing at him, the warm composite strength of materialism that enclosed and surrounded him, and, opposed to it, the clear imperative call — he named it to himself the Call of the Wings.

And while the one fought and clung the other scorned war and would not stoop to struggle. It only called — called unceasingly. . . . He heard it so clearly that it almost spoke in words.

"You cannot make terms with Me," it seemed to say. "For I am above all other things. If you follow my call you must give up all else and cut away the forces that hold you. For only the Free shall follow where I lead. . . ."

"I can't," cried Hamer. "I can't. . . ."

A few people turned to look at the big man who sat talking to himself.

So sacrifice was being asked of him, the sacrifice of that which was most dear to him, that which was part of himself.

Part of himself — he remembered the man without legs. . . .

"What in the name of Fortune brings you here?" asked Borrow.

Indeed the East-End mission was an unfamiliar background to Hamer.

"I've listened to a good many sermons," said the millionaire, "all saying what could be done if you people had funds. I've just come to tell you this: you can have the funds."

"Very good of you," answered Borrow, with some surprise. "A big subscription, eh?"

Hamer smiled dryly. "I should say so. Just every penny I've got."

"*What?*"

Hamer rapped out details in a brisk businesslike manner. Borrow's head was whirling.

"You — you mean to say that you're making over your entire fortune to be devoted to the relief of the poor in the East-End, with myself appointed as trustee?"

"That's it."

"But why — *why?*"

"I can't explain," said Hamer slowly. "Remember our talk about Visions last February? Well, a Vision has got hold of me."

"It's splendid!" Borrow leaned forward, his eyes gleaming.

"There's nothing particularly splendid about it," said Hamer grimly. "I

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don't care a button about poverty in the East-End. All they want is grit! *I* was poor enough — and I got out of it. But I've got to get rid of the money, and these tom-fool societies shan't get hold of it. You're a man I can trust. Feed bodies or souls with it — preferably the former. I've been hungry, but you can do as you like."

"There's never been such a thing known," stammered Borrow.

"The whole thing's done and finished with," continued Hamer. "The lawyers have fixed it up at last, and I've signed everything. I can tell you I've been busy this last fortnight. It's almost as difficult getting rid of a fortune as making one."

"But you — you've kept *something*?"

"Not a penny," said Hamer cheerfully. "At least — that's not quite true. I've just twopence in my pocket." He laughed.

He said good-bye to his bewildered friend, and walked out of the mission into the narrow evil-smelling streets. The words he had said so gaily just now came back to him with an aching sense of loss. "Not a penny!" Of all his vast wealth he had kept nothing. He was afraid now — afraid of poverty and hunger and cold. Sacrifice had no sweetness for him.

Yet behind it all he was conscious that the weight and menace of things had lifted, he was no longer oppressed and bound down. The severing of the chain had seared and torn him, but the vision of freedom was there to strengthen him. His material needs might dim the Call, but they could not deaden it, for he knew it to be a thing of immortality that could not die.

There was a touch of autumn in the air, and the wind blew chill. He felt the cold and shivered, and then, too, he was hungry — he had forgotten to have any lunch. It brought the future very near to him. It was incredible that he should have given it all up; the ease, the comfort, the warmth! His body cried out impotently. . . . And then once again there came to him a glad and uplifting sense of freedom.

Hamer hesitated. He was near a Tube station. He had twopence in his pocket. The idea came to him to journey by it to the Park where he had watched the recumbent idlers a fortnight ago. Beyond this whim he did not plan for the future. He believed honestly enough now that he was mad — sane people did not act as he had done. Yet, if so, madness was a wonderful and amazing thing.

Yes, he would go now to the open country of the Park, and there was a special significance to him in reaching it by Tube. For the Tube represented to him all the horrors of buried, shut-in life. . . . He would ascend from its imprisonment free to the wide green and the trees that concealed the menace of the pressing houses.

The lift bore him swiftly and relentlessly downward. The air was heavy

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and lifeless. He stood at the extreme end of the platform, away from the mass of people. On his left was the opening of the tunnel from which the train, snakelike, would presently emerge. He felt the whole place to be subtly evil. There was no one near him but a hunched-up lad sitting on a seat, sunk, it seemed, in a drunken stupor.

In the distance came the faint menacing roar of the train. The lad rose from his seat and shuffled unsteadily to Hamer's side, where he stood on the edge of the platform peering into the tunnel.

Then — it happened so quickly as to be almost incredible — he lost his balance and fell. . . .

A hundred thoughts rushed simultaneously to Hamer's brain. He saw a huddled heap run over by a motor 'bus, and heard a hoarse voice saying: "Dahn't yer blime yerself, guv'nor. Yer couldn't 'a done nothin'." And with that came the knowledge that *this* life could only be saved, if it were saved, by himself. There was no one else near, and the train was close. . . . It all passed through his mind with lightning rapidity. He experienced a curious calm lucidity of thought.

He had one short second in which to decide, and he knew in that moment that his fear of Death was unabated. He was horribly afraid. And then — was it not a forlorn hope? A useless throwing away of two lives?

To the terrified spectators at the other end of the platform there seemed no gap between the boy's fall and the man's jump after him — and then the train, rushing round the curve of the tunnel, powerless to pull up in time.

Swiftly Hamer caught up the lad in his arms. No natural gallant impulse swayed him, his shivering flesh was but obeying the command of the alien spirit that called for sacrifice. With a last effort he flung the lad forward on to the platform, falling himself. . . .

Then suddenly his Fear died. The material world held him down no longer. He was free of his shackles. He fancied for a moment that he heard the joyous piping of Pan. Then — nearer and louder — swallowing up all else — came the glad rushing of innumerable Wings . . . enveloping and encircling him. . . .

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A certain author whose thinking and writing we esteem stated in a recent article that the possibilities of the time-travel story have now been exhausted. We violently disagree with that thesis. As editors, we've learned that the possibilities of any fictional theme are never exhausted; just when you think they are, along comes an author with a wonderfully original twist on an old idea. Here Mack Reynolds has created an entirely new approach to the ever-enticing theme of the time-traveler and what he may encounter. If Mr. Reynolds' hilarious concept of the Thirtieth Century is correct (and why shouldn't it be?) we'd better start right now revising all our ideas about time travel,— and the qualifications for the job!

The Business, As Usual

by MACK REYNOLDS

"LISTEN," the time traveler said to the first pedestrian who came by, "I'm from the Twentieth Century. I've only got fifteen minutes and then I'll go back. I guess it's too much to expect you to understand me, eh?"

"Certainly, I understand you."

"Hey! You talk English fine. How come?"

"We call it Amer-English. I happen to be a student of dead languages."

"Swell! But, listen, I only got a few minutes. Let's get going."

"Get going?"

"Yeah, yeah. Look, don't you get it? I'm a time traveler. They picked me to send into the future. I'm important."

"Ummm. But you must realize that we have time travelers turning up continuously these days."

"Listen, that rocks me, but I just don't have time to go into it, see? Let's get to the point."

"Very well. What have you got?"

"What'd'ya mean, what've I got?"

The other sighed. "Don't you think you should attempt to acquire some evidence that you have been in the future? I can warn you now, the paradoxes involved in time travel prevent you from taking back any knowledge which might alter the past. On your return, your mind will be blank in regard to what happened here."

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The time traveler blinked. "Oh?"

"Definitely. However, I shall be glad to make a trade with you."

"Listen, I get the feeling I came into this conversation half a dozen sentences too late. What'd'ya mean, a trade?"

"I am willing to barter something of your century for something of mine, although, frankly, there is little in your period that is of other than historical interest to us." The pedestrian's eyes held a gleam now. He cleared his throat. "However, I have here an atomic pocket knife. I hesitate to even tell you of the advantages it has over the knives of your period."

"Okay. I got only ten minutes left, but I can see you're right. I've got to get something to prove I was here."

"My knife would do it," the pedestrian nodded.

"Yeah, yeah. Listen, I'm a little confused, like. They picked me for this job the last minute — didn't want to risk any of these professor guys, see? That's the screwiest knife I ever saw, let me have it for my evidence."

"Just a moment, friend. Why should I give you my knife? What can you offer in exchange?"

"But I'm from the Twentieth Century."

"Ummm. And I'm from the Thirtieth."

The time traveler looked at him for a long moment. Finally, "Listen, pal, I don't have a lot of time. Now, for instance, my watch —"

"Ummm. And what else?"

"Well, my money, here."

"Of interest only to a numismatist."

"Listen, I *gotta* have some evidence I been in the Thirtieth Century!"

"Of course. But business is business as the proverb goes."

"I wish the hell I had a gun."

"I have no use for a gun in this age," the other said primly.

"No, but I have," the time traveler muttered. "Look, fella, my time is running out by the second. What d'ya want? You see what I got, clothes, my wallet, a little money, a key ring, a pair of shoes."

"I'm willing to trade, but your possessions are of small value. Now some art object — an original Al Capp or something."

The time traveler was plaintive. "Do I look like I'd be carrying around art objects? Listen, I'll give you everything I got but my pants for that screwy knife."

"Oh, you want to keep your pants, eh? What're you trying to do, Anglo me down? — Or does your period antedate the term?"

"Anglo . . . what? I don't get it."

"Well, I'm quite an etymologist —"

"That's too bad, but —"

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"Not at all, a fascinating hobby," the pedestrian said. "Now as to the phrase *Anglo me down.* The term Anglo first came into popular use during the 1850–1950 period. It designated persons from the Eastern United States, English descent principally, who came into New Mexico and Arizona shortly after the area was liberated — I believe that was the term used at the time — from Mexico. The Spanish and Indians came to know the Easterners as Anglos."

The time traveler said desperately, "Listen, *pal,* we get further and further from —"

"Tracing back the derivation of the phrase takes us along two more side trails. It goes back to the fact that these Anglos became the wealthiest businessmen of the Twentieth Century. So much so that they soon dominated the world with their dollars."

"Okay, okay. I know all about that. Personally I never had enough dollars to dominate anybody, but —"

"Very well, the point is that the Anglos became the financial wizards of the world, the most clever dealers, the sharpest bargainers, the most competent businessmen."

The time traveler shot a quick despairing look at his watch. "Only three —"

"The third factor is one taken from still further in the past. At one time there was a racial minority, which many of the Anglos held in disregard, called the Joos. For many years the term had been used, to *Joo you down* — meaning to make the price lower. As the Anglos assumed their monetary dominance, the term evolved from *Joo you down* to *Anglo you down;* and thus it has come down to our own day, although neither Anglo nor Joo still exists as a separate people."

The time traveler stared at him. "And I won't be able to take the memory of this story back with me, eh? And me a guy named Levy." He darted another look at his watch and groaned. "Quick!" he said, "Let's make this trade; everything I got for that atomic knife!"

The deal was consummated. The citizen of the Thirtieth Century stood back, his loot in his arms, and watched as the citizen of the Twentieth, nude but with the knife grasped tightly and happily in hand, faded slowly from view.

The knife poised momentarily in empty air, then dropped to the ground as the time traveler completely disappeared.

The other stooped, retrieved it, and stuck it back in his pocket. "Even more naive than usual," he muttered. "Must have been one of the very first. I suppose they'll never reconcile themselves to the paradoxes. Obviously, you can carry things *forward* in time, since that's the natural flow of the

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dimension; but you just can't carry anything, not even memory, *backward* against the current."

He resumed his journey homeward.

Marget, hands on hips, met him at the door. "Where in *kert* have you been?" she snapped.

"You mustn't swear, darling," he said. "I met another time traveler on the way home."

"You didn't —"

"Certainly, why not? If I didn't somebody else would."

"But you've already got the closet overflowing with —"

"Now Marget, don't look that way. One of these days some museum or collector —"

She grunted skeptically and turned back into the house.

The Big Nasturtiums

All of a sudden the big nasturtiums
Rose in the night from the ocean's bed,
Rested awhile in the light of the morning,
Turning the sand dunes tiger red.

They covered the statue of Abraham Lincoln,
They climbed to the top of our church's spire.
"Grandpa! Grandpa! Come to the window!
Come to the window! Our world's afire!"

Big nasturtiums in the High Sierras,
Big nasturtiums in the lands below;
Our trains are late and our planes have fallen,
And out in the ocean the whistles blow.

Over the fields and over the forests,
Over the living and over the dead —
"I never expected the big nasturtiums
To come in my lifetime!" Grandpa said.

— Robert Beverly Hale

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For many years Sam Merwin, Jr. has been one of the most active professionals in the field of popular fiction. He's published a series of amusing mystery novels and countless hundreds of thousands of words of science fiction while at the same time managing to edit not one but two science-fantasy magazines. (It takes two of us to edit one; and we can't help feeling awed respect for what Mr. Merwin accomplished single-handed in raising the standards of two.) A short while ago, however, Merwin abandoned editing and even deliberately cut down on his prolific production as a pulp writer. At present he's devoting himself to more serious (though by no means ponderous) imaginative writing — strange and provocative concepts fully developed and fictionally fleshed. Among the first products of this new Merwin period are that fascinating study in multiple universes, THE HOUSE OF MANY WORLDS, *(Doubleday, 1951), and this story, which startlingly presents a completely new concept of the relationship of human beings to those who are not quite of the same species.*

Lambikin

by SAM MERWIN, JR.

THE PLACE was in Greenwich Village. Jeannette freed her arms from her mandarin-cut Persian lamb, draped it cape-fashion over her shoulders while Charley Field fought his way through to the bar. From the restless hum of male voices she gathered that Jumbo Hennessy would pulverize the Champ in a matter of five or six rounds.

Someone turned on the sound and the razor blades that had been dancing a mute ballet on the big television screen high in the corner acquired meaning and, with meaning, absurdity. Unamused, Jeannette delved behind the brass regimental plate on the lid of her black saddle-leather bag, brought out a cigarette, lit it.

Fights, she thought. All this mock-tension because a couple of unlettered gladiators were holding a public contest. Repeating itself endlessly in scores of thousands of similar places, perhaps in millions of homes between Boston and San Francisco. She found such widespread uniformity of attention a little frightening.

She could see by the motions of Charley's head that he had made contact with a bartender, was issuing instructions. She let her gaze slide on past the

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bar, past the row of booths against the back wall — each one an isolated emotional kaleidoscope — to the occupants of the other tables on the dark-white tile floor.

A man at the next table was regarding her fixedly from less than five feet away. A lean loosely-dressed man with short wiry dark hair and a long face whose planes and angles gave an impression of remarkable ugliness. He wore a splashy Saxony gun club jacket and flannel slacks and his thin fingers toyed with the sweaty surfaces of a stein of dark beer.

His eyes, of an unusually light blue-gray, were fixed upon her with unblinking interest. Jeannette shivered, thought — *Goodness! I really should have worn clothes.* With a little dart of panic she saw the beginning of a smile tug at the corners of his full mouth.

He couldn't possibly have read her frivolous thought — yet how else could she explain his smile? Although Jeannette was both tolerant and reasonably experienced she found the idea of such invasion of her innermost privacy indecent.

She looked toward Charley for succor, battling the fright that had made a keyboard of her diaphragm. She felt a sudden need for normality and Charley Field was nothing if not normal. The big tow-headed Mickey Mouse, a glass in either hand, was arguing with someone at the bar — a little gray man with a tic.

Jeannette sighed and tipped ashes from her cigarette. She knew the symptoms — Charley was making a bet on the forthcoming fight. Furthermore he was going to win — he always did. It was, Jeannette felt, one of the factors that made him so unvital. Things like bets and jobs and money and girls came easily to Charley.

"He's not going to win this one." The voice, barely above a whisper, cut through the hubbub of voices and bar-sounds. Without turning Jeannette knew its source and a shiver crow-hopped her spine. The stranger behind her added, "Your friend Mr. Field just put ten dollars on Hennessy to win. The Champ is going to knock him out in the second."

Involuntarily Jeannette nodded. She battled vainly an impulse to look again, again found herself meeting the unusually light eyes — killer's eyes, she thought, with a horrid fascination. Their owner nodded with a half-smile that said, "You're welcome," as distinctly as if he had spoken.

He rose then and the man with him rose as if attached to him by wires. Jeannette noticed this one for the first time, decided he could have replaced either of the fighters about to appear on the screen, forgot him as her eyes followed the man in the gun club jacket. He moved absently through the crowd toward the street door as if unaware of the presence of others. Yet she noted that his progress was both swift and without collision.

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"Sorry to be so slow." Charley was smugly unapologetic as he set their drinks on the table, drew up a chair for himself. "A character named Mickey Lewis just conned me into taking his money on a sucker bet."

"You're out ten dollars," Jeannette found herself saying. "Hennessy hasn't a chance."

Charley Field coughed over the cigarette he had just lighted. Recovered, he stared at her in astonishment, said, "For Christ's sake what do *you* know — and how did you know I bet ten bucks?"

Jeannette was trapped. She couldn't very well tell him about her tip from the strange man who wasn't there any longer. So she shrugged, said, "Don't you always bet ten dollars on the fights on alternate Wednesdays? Oh, hell — call it coincidence. But the Champ is going to win by a knockout." Oddly she felt as certain of this as if it had already happened. There had been something about the man with the very light eyes.

Charley, touched on the raw of masculine knowhow, was indignant. "Oh?" he said. "I suppose you know what round too."

"You just named it," she told him. "Round two."

Charley reached for his wallet, laid a ten-dollar bill on the table. "Put up or shut up," he stated. "One will win you this ten if you're right."

"All right," she said. It was the first bet she had made or accepted in her life. She dug a dollar out of her purse, added, "I ought to make it more, I suppose, but it really wouldn't be fair." Curiously enough, she meant it.

Speechless, Charley took refuge in his drink. By the time he emerged the referee had finished giving his instructions and the fight was getting under way.

Jeannette's serene confidence was jolted when the Champ went down for a brief count toward the end of the first round, then began to bicycle frantically to elude the fists of his tormentor. She didn't have to look at Charley to see the mocking grin he was wearing.

Somehow the Champ weathered the round but his knees wobbled as he went back to his corner and he was bleeding black television blood from a cut over his right eye. Jeannette heard Charley mutter something about "taking candy from out of the mouths of babes and suckers" and resolutely held her eyes on the screen.

The second round began badly for the Champ as Hennessy, scenting a kill, came leaping out with the bell to stalk his man around the ring. Once again he crowded the Negro into a corner, moved in with both fists cocked. But the battered Champ made no attempt to duck. Instead, rolling into the ropes, he used their elasticity to catapult him out, throwing a savage bolo punch.

The blow caught the incoming Hennessy flush on the chin. To Jeannette

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the challenger's face seemed to dissolve on the screen. Slipping clear the Champ jabbed with a left, setting up the finisher. But he had no need of another punch. Hennessy fell flat on his face, never twitched while the referee counted him out.

Alarm enfolded Jeannette like a too-tight girdle. How, she wondered, had the stranger known? For that matter how had he known the nature and amount of Charley's bet? It was the most extraordinary thing that had ever happened to her.

"For God's sake, don't you want it?" Charley was pushing the money toward her across the table.

"Not especially," she said. "It really wasn't fair. You see I —" she caught herself barely in time — "I was *too* lucky."

"Jenny," said Charley, lifting his glass, "with your luck and my looks we could make beautiful music together."

"What a ghastly thought!" said Jeannette, shuddering. There was, she thought, a lot of evening still ahead of her — a lot of evening to be got through somehow.

Jeannette's work went badly the next day. Each change she made in the clay of the non-objective figure upon which she had been toiling for two weeks had to be eradicated. She told herself that her fat-handedness was caused by the traces of hangover which throbbed gently at her temples.

Within herself she knew better. It was memory of the extraordinary man with the extraordinarily light eyes that barred her from integration in her work. There was no explanation, of course — no acceptable explanation. But it nagged at her, worried her.

She was on the point of quitting and telling the phone service people to reconnect her and give her whatever messages were waiting when the downstairs doorbell rang. She pressed the admittance button, began to rub clay from her hands on a cloth.

When the apartment bell rang and she opened the door she found herself looking at a stranger — until she recalled sketchily the man who had risen and left with the light-eyed man. She said vaguely, "Oh — hello. What can I do for *you?*"

"Not me — Mr. Farquarson," he said in flat accents. "The man I work for. He's been trying to call you all day, Miss Rainey. He sent me down here to see if you'll see him."

"Come in," she said, stood aside to admit him. Somehow she failed to feel surprise. "Now" — after closing the door — "let's begin again. Who's Mr. Farquarson — the man you were with last night?"

The intruder blinked. "*Him?* Keeri — sorry, Miss Rainey. No. Tony."

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Jeannette, feeling odd, caught-in-a-mixmaster sensations, said, "How did you learn my name?"

"Don't ask me — Tony knew it. He's nuttier than a fruitcake," the man said solemnly. "Mr. Farquarson's older — he's a very rich man." There was reverence in the adjective. "He asked me if you was willing to have me drive you up to see him."

"I see," fibbed Jeannette. For the first time she noticed that her visitor's gray suit was actually a chauffeur's livery, that the cap he held against his left thigh had a visor. "Does he live out of town?" she inquired.

"No, on Fifth Avenue," said the chauffeur. "He says he wants to talk to you about Tony."

Jeannette lit a cigarette, pushed back her pale reddish hair, tried to think. She didn't get very far, said, "All right, I'll see him. But you'll have to wait while I change."

"That's okay, Miss Rainey," said the chauffeur, eyeing the sculpture that lined the studio. "That your work?"

"Some of it," said Jeannette, moving toward the bedroom door. "How do you like it?"

"Jeest!" said the chauffeur, his low brow ribboned with perplexity as he looked at the rhythmic non-objective shapes and patterns. "I dunno. I guess it's okay if you . . ."

". . . go in for that sort of thing," Jeannette finished for him. She closed the bedroom door firmly, concentrated on what to wear. Charley, she thought, would have a hemorrhage if he knew what she was doing. Therefore Charley was not going to know. She eyed the dresses in her closet, wondering what was proper for an occasion that conceivably might wind up with herself in the hold of a vessel bound for Buenos Aires. Then she decided she was thinking like somebody's grandmother.

The car in which her visitor, whose name was Jeff, drove her uptown was a reassuring black Rolls of unimpeachable antecedents and grooming. The house to which it took her was a pseudo-Norman city chateau halfway between the Frick Palace and the Metropolitan Museum. And Mr. Farquarson was an elderly man of unmistakably gentle appearance with voice and manners to match.

He received her in a second-story drawingroom whose wide windows overlooked the March gauntness of Central Park — a cool gray room of unexpected and pleasant modern decor. He sat on a low sofa opposite Jeannette and studied her at length and in silence.

"Is my slip showing?" Jeannette asked him.

He had the grace to blush slightly and say, "I didn't intend to embarrass you, Miss Rainey, but the situation is so unusual . . ."

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"I won't bite," Jeannette told him. "And I'm damned curious myself." She plunged, adding, "If this Tony is a telepathic clairvoyant why all the hush-hush?"

Mr. Farquarson regarded her somberly, looking like a forlorn gnome. He said, "Because Tony — Creighton Jessup, my nephew — is hopelessly insane."

"He didn't act insane last night," Jeannette countered. "Besides, how does his condition concern me?"

"It varies, of course." Mr. Farquarson sighed. "I wish you would tell me about last night — as *you* saw it, of course. And before you do I'd like to thank you for coming here this afternoon — also for being you."

"Mr. Farquarson — I haven't had lunch!" said Jeannette, at once regretting her flippancy. She launched into as complete an account as she could of what had happened in the Village bar.

When she had finished her host rose, walked to a window, said, "This Charley — is he very important to you?"

"He's a very dear friend," Jeannette told him. "He wants me to marry him. But I was married once and it didn't take and I'm in no hurry to repeat. After all I have my work. But how does Charley come into this? I told him nothing about it."

"He doesn't come into it," said Mr. Farquarson quietly.

"And I do?" Jeannette was incredulous.

"If you wish to," said her host.

Jeannette lit a cigarette, replied, "In that case suppose you tell me what it's all about. At the moment I seem to be suffering from some very odd ideas."

He said, "Of course." Then, "Would you like a drink?" Jeannette would and a wooden-faced butler brought them excellent daiquiris, which Mr. Farquarson poured himself. Then he sat down and told her the story of his nephew.

"Tony was always strange," he began. "Sensitive, lonely, intensely emotional — and brilliant. He took after his father — he was Lawrence Jessup, the historian — rather than my sister. She was a large woman with two devotions — horses and domination of the unfortunate in the name of what she held to be worthy causes."

As he talked Jeannette could see a pattern taking shape — the lonely rich boy with a father lost to him through the demands of a scholarly career and a mother who considered affection a mark of vulgarity. She could almost feel his misery at the boarding schools in which he had spent the bulk of his boyhood and youth.

"I did what I could," Mr. Farquarson told her. "I used to visit him

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once a term and send him a small check every month. But Genevra — my sister — was not a woman to brook interference with any property she felt to be hers. She was a highly possessive woman. Poor Tony was wretchedly unpopular, of course.

"Then Genevra and Larry were killed in an automobile accident en route to Tony's prep school commencement. Genevra was driving, as usual, and at the inquest it was proved that the other driver was wrong. But since he was driving a truck . . ." Mr. Farquarson seemed to derive faint dry amusement from his sister's ironic fate.

"Tony came here to live with me then," he concluded. "But it was already too late to save him."

"What is it — schizophrenia?" Jeannette asked. And, at her host's curt nod, "Can't it be cured?"

"He doesn't want to be cured," said Mr. Farquarson.

"You mean he knows he's insane?" she asked him.

"Certainly — but he doesn't consider his condition insanity. And some of his gifts are remarkable — clairvoyance is only one of them. He insists that he is following perfectly logical lines of behavior — lines the rest of us cannot see. Sometimes I almost believe he's right. Five years ago he saved my fortune by predicting to a decimal how the stock market would go the next day. At other times — I simply don't know."

"It sounds incredible," said Jeannette sincerely, "but I still don't see where and how I fit into the picture."

"Miss Rainey, Tony can endure only a very few persons. I believe he is genuinely fond of me and Jeff amuses him. Others he detests. He prefers the company of a familiar he calls Leslie."

"A familiar?" asked Jeannette, puzzled.

Mr. Farquarson made a gesture of helplessness, said, "No one can see him but Tony — but sometimes . . ." He sighed, added, "If you saw the play *Harvey* you might have some idea."

"I saw the movie," said Jeannette. She frowned, trying to concentrate, to work out the problem. "Is Leslie a rabbit?"

"No — only my nephew seems to know *what* Leslie is. But to Tony he and his world are more real than we and this one," Mr. Farquarson told her. "He doesn't care much about our concept of reality, I'm afraid."

He paused and when Jeannette said nothing, added, "For some obscure reason — I don't wish to sound uncomplimentary, Miss Rainey, but it's impossible to apply rational standards to Tony — he saw you last night and liked you. He wants you to live here. He knew your name, of course, and where you lived — don't ask me how."

"But —" began Jeannette, incredulous.

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"I know it's an impossible request — but I promised Tony I'd try," Mr. Farquarson said quickly. Then, very seriously, "You are the first and only person he has ever expressed a liking for to my knowledge. He has asked me to ask you to move your things here — we can arrange a studio on the top floor — and live with us."

"Mr. Farquarson," said Jeannette, getting to her feet, "I'd like very much to help your nephew but naturally it's out of the question. I suppose I ought to be angry but —"

"'. . . in view of your motives, Mr. Farquarson, I can only say I'm very sorry and go,'" said her host.

Jeannette discovered her mouth was foolishly open. She closed it, said, "How did you know what I was going to say? Don't tell me *you* ——"

"Hardly," he smiled wryly. "Tony told me this morning. He also said that you would take the job for $200 a week above living expenses. However, after meeting you, I naturally feel hesitant about putting any such transaction on a cash basis."

"Thanks, thanks a lot!" said Jeannette, suddenly as angry as she had ever been in her life. Nor was her anger lessened by the fact that such a sum would in a few months free her from distasteful haggling over alimony payments with her ex-husband's attorneys. "I think perhaps I'd better set things straight with your nephew — right now," she added. "Where is he?"

Mr. Farquarson, at once troubled, determined and apologetic, ushered her up another floor in the elevator, then into a drawing room at the rear of the mansion. It was a tall square chamber and, with Venetian blinds drawn, a dim one in the afternoon light.

Tony Jessup, rumpled and more lankly ugly than the night before, assembled himself vertically from a graceful chaise longue. There was compelling charm in his smile, in the way he pushed straight dark cropped hair back on his scalp. He said, "I'm so very glad you came today, Jenny."

Jeannette managed to rally her indignation although, under the gaze of those oddly light eyes, it was difficult. She said bluntly, "I don't think you're insane at all." She ignored a gasp from Mr. Farquarson behind her. "I think you fake insanity to get away from a world you're afraid to face."

"Which is a remarkably sound definition of insanity according to present-day psychiatry," Tony told her quietly. Then, to his uncle, "I'd like to see Miss Rainey alone." And, reading her impulse to flee, "Don't be afraid, Jenny — I shan't hurt you in any way."

"You've already cost me a day's work," she accused.

"I'm sorry about that," he replied, "but perhaps it was more your fault

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than mine. Tell me about it." He sat down on the chaise as Jeannette gingerly sat on the edge of a chair, added, "You don't have to talk — just think about it."

She decided later he must have hypnotized her. Thinking it over she realized that neither Tony Jessup nor herself said more than a dozen words during the 90 minutes it lasted. Yet all that time Jeannette could sense conversation flowing unheard about her — Tony's, her own, someone else's — or perhaps some*thing* else's.

Finally, with the room almost dark, he rose and went to a desk in a corner and, without turning on a light, sketched quickly on a pad, brought it to her. "This should help you, Jenny," he said. "I'm sorry I made it hard for you this morning."

His words brought her out of the trance. Frightened, she thrust the paper into her bag, muttered something about its being horribly late. He smiled at her and she wondered how she could ever have thought him ugly. He said, "I'm sorry you can't stay — yet. But I'm glad you're coming back."

Jeannette fled. She saw no one while leaving the house, took a cab back to her Greenwich Village apartment. There, of course, Charley was waiting, large and normal and irked at her for having forgotten their cocktail date.

"Oh, Charley!" she said sincerely. "I'm so damned sorry! I'll make it up to you — let me take you to dinner."

"Always did want to be a gigolo," said Charley and she laughed and kissed him and was affectionate beyond her wont with him all evening. But at its conclusion she begged off letting him come upstairs for nightcap and inevitable concomitants.

Only then, while unloading her bag for the night, did she come upon Tony Jessup's sketch. Her first impulse was to toss it away, to erase this memento of her odd adventure. But somehow she couldn't. Perhaps, she thought, it was memory of Tony's uncanny fight prediction of the night before — or perhaps it was something stronger prodding her consciousness.

At any rate she unfolded the sketch and studied it — felt the blood drain from her face. It was a front elevation of the non-objective figure that was baffling her — drawn easily and accurately. But it was more — it was her figure with certain changes, changes she had been unable to visualize, unable to carry through earlier.

Jeannette shook as she flung off her dress, donned shorts, halter and smock. The fatigue she had pleaded with Charley moments earlier was gone. Excitement, inspiration, tingled within her, prodded her toward work. The changes had to be made — made *then.*

When it was done morning sunlight streamed through the north light

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and the fluorescent tubes glowed feebly. Absently Jeannette turned them off, stood back to study her night's work.

It was finished, it was perfect,—and somehow, in its combination of planes and curves and angles and mass and line, it was subtly not hers. *Trilby*, she thought and decided she didn't give a damn. It was far and away the best thing she had done. She called her agent, who lived nearby and promised to drop in before going uptown to her Fifty-seventh Street office.

Madge Cunningham was a woman of early middle age whose deep artistic zest and sympathy had been long since tempered by the endless ulcery of dealing with artists on an intensely personal business basis. She wore her wrinkles proudly, had once been described to Jeannette as managing to appear swathed in sables even while clad in a borrowed bathing suit at somebody's Bucks County pool. She said, "Jeannette, are you sober? You look shot."

"I should be," Jeannette replied. "I've been knocking myself out on this thing all night. And if you try to tell me it's not finished I'll finish *you* with a maul."

"Let's see it," la Cunningham said tolerantly. Then, "Oh — over there. Hmmmm." Silence held like a tethered kid while she stalked the studio floor. Jeannette, suddenly unconfident, managed to rip an unlighted cigarette to shreds.

"*Dar*ling!" said Madge suddenly, risking her impeccable pancake in a quick embrace. "I think at last you've *hit* it!" She looked again at the statue, frowned, added, "But it's odd — just a little frightening. You haven't been having visions or anything like that, have you, Jenny dear?"

"Don't worry — I'm no Wilhelmina Blake," Jeannette told her. "But I *do* think it's my best to date."

"No doubt about it," said Madge. She frowned again. "It's almost *too* good. But never fear, darling, it's just what Orlin wants for the mainspring of his annual show. Frankly I never thought of you for *that* spot." Then, with a sudden intent stare, "Do you think you can keep it up, sweety?"

"I think so," said Jeannette and all at once she felt the trap snap shut about her. Major display in the Orlin Gallery's annual show meant success she had to date only dreamt about as a morale booster. "I think so — in fact I'm sure of it."

"If you can, darling, we're both going to be feelthy reech," said Madge.

"Okay, Madge," said Jeannette. All at once she was utterly spent. She shooed her agent out and barely managed to last till noon, when Madge's porters came for the statue. Then she flung herself on her bed.

It was dusk when the ringing of the downstairs bell wakened her. Feeling

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as if she had been asleep but a few minutes Jeannette managed to answer it. Somehow she was not surprised to discover that it was Jeff, the chauffeur. Cap in hand he said in his husky raw voice, "Tony seemed to think you might want to come to the house for dinner. Your phone was off again so Mr. Farquarson sent me down to ask you."

"That was very considerate of him," said Jeannette. "Does he want me to wear my suitcases?"

"Tony says that's up to you." Jeff shrugged his indifference. The worst of it was, she thought, that Jeff, like Tony, like Mr. Farquarson and — yes — like herself, knew she was going to do it.

Sharing a roof with a madman — even a roof as richly mansarded as that of the Farquarson mansion — proved scarcely a routine social experience for Jeannette. The move itself was complex. There were Charley and Madge and other less urgent loose ends to be managed. Jeannette told everyone she was isolating herself in a Maine cabin to do some serious work. She gave her true address only to the post office, promised Charley a definite answer on her return, promised Madge plenty of work.

A week after her first encounter with Tony in the bar she was established in a comfortable if makeshift studio suite on the top floor rear of the Fifth Avenue mansion. Mr. Farquarson was pathetically grateful. "We'll all do our best to make you glad you came," he told her. "I've already opened a savings account at my bank in your name." He gravely handed her a bankbook that revealed an initial deposit of $2400.

"But — I may not want to stay," Jeannette said desperately. "After all, this *is* an experiment."

"Call it a retainer," said Mr. Farquarson firmly. "It's worth a great deal more than that to me to have Tony happy."

"But what do I have to *do?*" she almost wailed.

"Just live your normal life," he said. "Would you care for a cocktail?"

For Jeannette, accustomed to the easy-going upper-case Bohemia of Greenwich Village, living a "normal" life in the Farquarson mansion involved a complete shift of values. At first she dug hard at her work — but ideas refused to come. And she could not pick up the telephone and invite fellow-artists over for a pump-priming session as was her wont. She could not even go out for a walk without risking the complications of being seen and recognized.

Tony showed not the slightest interest in her work. Now that he had her under the same roof he seemed to have lost interest in her. When he appeared at table, which was seldom, he was so unaware of his surroundings that he messed up his food like a baby.

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Finally, desperate, she visited his drawing room, found him on the chaise longue, his light eyes open, staring at nothing. His stillness alarmed her to flight. She was awaiting the elevator to return to her studio when she hear Tony call Jeff. There were quick footsteps on the back stairs, Tony's "You let her come in and break the contact," the sudden shocking sound of a violent blow. Jeannette raced panting up the stairs to lock herself in.

She planned to tell Mr. Farquarson that evening that it would be impossible for her to stay on or to accept his money — but Tony's uncle was away at his club, celebrating some sort of annual conviviality, and by the time he returned Jeannette was asleep.

With morning she felt revulsion at her panic, reminded herself that she had known what she was in for when she agreed to come to the house. She plunged vigorously into work on a figure though she was without inspiration, sought release through physical toil. And, shortly before noon, Tony Jessup strolled into her impromptu studio for the first time.

"Sorry if I've been rude, Jenny," he told her casually. "I can only say I've been extremely busy. Let's see what you're doing."

"It stinks," said Jeannette, rubbing her itching nose with the back of a clay-stained hand. "See for yourself."

He straddled a chair, looked at the shapeless blob on which Jeannette was laboring, then studied her. Once again she sensed talk flowing about her, being questioned and giving answers she didn't know she possessed, being part of a three-way conversation in which only two participants were visible, none heard.

Later — how much later she never knew — he said aloud, "I think we can straighten you out, Jenny. I'll make you a sketch. But first, you were planning to do your figure in terra cotta ultimately." It was statement, not question. "We — that is, I — believe bronze will be far more effective."

"But the darker color will —" she began.

". . . help it immensely," said Tony, picking up pad and crayon. "Here — this will show you."

It did, of course — and of course it was no longer *her* idea. It was better than anything she had ever thought of, would ever be able to think of. In bronze, as Tony had sketched it, it would be very close to a masterpiece. She said, "Thanks," lit a cigarette, eyed him warily. "Tell me, Tony, have you ever studied sculpture — studied art in any form?"

"Hardly," he replied. "I've been much too busy." Then, "Why — isn't it what you want?"

"It's what I want," she said simply. "But if you know nothing of art or sculpture how can you solve my problems so easily?"

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"I didn't say I knew nothing about it," he replied. "It's just that I haven't studied it."

"Explain, please," she said, eyes on her cigarette.

"Well, it's . . ." he began, then blurted, "Leslie tells me. And then sometimes I can read people's minds. They have so much more than they're able to use." He looked at her hopelessly, added, "Now I suppose you'll say I'm crazy and leave."

"Sure you're crazy — I'll accept that," she said. "And thanks for helping me — both times. But one thing I don't like. You said — or told your uncle — that you wanted me here. I've been here a week and this is the first time you've even spoken to me."

"I told you I've been busy," he said defensively.

"How, busy — busy at what?" she countered. She sensed his resentment at her questions but she had to ask him, had to know.

"With Leslie," he replied. "I have a great deal to learn in Leslie's world and it requires ignoring this one as much as possible. I'll try to give you more time in the future."

"Don't knock yourself out," said Jeannette with acid. "But if it's such an effort why want me here at all?"

"When I was a little boy we lived in Mount Kisko," he told her. "It was a big place and I was lonely. We had a little white lamb I used to play with."

"My hair isn't white *yet* — but go on," said Jeannette.

"There isn't much more," said Tony, suddenly grim. "My late mother believed in production for use."

It took a moment to sink in. Then she got it, said, "Lamb chops."

He eyed her somberly, told her, "I've never eaten lamb since. I won't allow it in this house."

"And I'm supposed to replace the lamb," Jeannette said quietly. For the first time since Tony predicted the fight-result she felt fear — fear of an intangible sort utterly unfamiliar to her.

"Perhaps, in a way," he told her. "Don't worry — it's all right." He had again read her thoughts, was at the door. "I hope the sketch helps," he said as he vanished.

Again Jeannette was tempted to throw a sketch away — and again could not. Unable to sort out the emotions at war within her, she got back to work, readying a model for casting in bronze.

Tony paid her daily visits, was solicitous, kindly, fascinating, alarming. At last, almost a month after her immurement, the model was ready. He helped her wrap it for transport, said, "Jeff will take it to Madge's for you."

"I'm going too," she told him. "I've been cooped up in here long enough."

"Of course," said Tony. "I was only thinking of you. You'll be less apt

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to be seen and recognized if you let Jeff drive you downtown. You wouldn't want that, would you?"

"Right now I don't know what I want," she said bluntly. "All I do know is that if I don't get out of here I'll go stark staring mad."

Immediately she was aghast at what she had said. She looked at Tony guiltily, ashamed. But he merely smiled, said, "Enjoy yourself — I'll come down to see you at dinner."

Madge said, "I was just going to send you a Special. Orlin is giving that thing of yours a room to itself — trick lighting, the works. And the Museum of Modern Art, San Francisco and a Hollywood producer are bidding against each other for it. How do you like them apples, honeychile?"

"Love 'em," said Jeannette. "Take your time — I've brought along something new and special for casting."

Madge sighed. "Here I've been dreaming you up a gorgeous secret romance and you've been *working!* Honestly, Jenny . . ." But she went outside with a porter, bossed the bringing in of the new work. She unwrapped it herself, studied it, uttered a half dozen hmmmms, then said, "We'll keep it under wraps until the first one is sold, darling."

Jeannette's heart used her stomach as a trampoline. "Oh, *no!*" she cried. "It can't be *that* bad!" Yet relief mingled with disappointment. If Tony had failed, her bondage was ended.

But Madge stared at her. "*Bad!*" she exclaimed. "Darling, if it casts as it ought to that damned thing is so good the first one will be lost in the rush. It's — it's — what *is* it anyway, Jenny?"

"I haven't the slightest idea," Jeannette told her.

"Well — whatever it is it scares hell out of me," said Madge. "Perhaps making it a mystery won't hurt." She lit a cigarette, eyed Jeannette with shrewd suspicion. Jeannette could see suspicion grow into comprehension.

"*Maine!*" Madge exploded derisively. "Not a trace of sunburn, no mosquito bites, no sunbleach in your hair. Darling, I've *been* to Maine. And unless memory fails me your chauffeur is Wayland Farquarson's."

"You know him?" Jeannette's voice quavered slightly.

"I know everyone with $1000 in the bank," replied Madge scornfully. "And I know Wayland's summering in town." Her eyes narrowed. "But since his attack last year Wayland has doctor's orders not to . . ." She paused, considered, said, "It *couldn't* be the chauffeur."

"It isn't — nor is it your business," Jeannette told her.

"Nonsense — anything you do is my business — ten percent my business anyway." Increased interest caused her small dark eyes to glitter. "The nephew," she breathed, "the mad nephew — I simply *can't* believe it!"

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"You don't have to — besides, it's nothing like that," Jeannette told her angrily. "You don't think I'd . . ."

"I think it's absolutely fascinating, darling." Madge hugged her. "Never fear, I shall tell no one — not even Charley. I *adore* secrets. Besides, it's much more artistic than poor dear Charley. A rich handsome *mad*man! And your new work. If it isn't a romance — and I refuse to believe it isn't — you're nuttier than he is. I do hope you'll be careful though. After all . . ."

Jeannette fled, glad to get back to her self-made prison. She wondered how long Madge would — or could — keep her secret. Madge was a woman with more heart and wisdom than she affected but her love of the dramatic caused her tongue to wag at times.

The next week went by slowly. Jeannette was restless, unable to get back to work. Tony spent considerable time with her — as of course did Leslie. She found herself growing accustomed to Tony's invisible companion — much, she thought, like the folk in *Harvey* who hung around Elwood P. Dowd. She became used to unheard conversations, to having her mind read.

Then, the following Saturday, she got a Special from Madge addressed to the Farquarson mansion. It told her that the first statue had been sold to the San Francisco museum for just under $4000. A check for $900 was enclosed, the balance being due upon delivery after the Orlin show.

"Here," she said impulsively, offering it to Tony, who was with her in the studio when the letter arrived. "You ought to have this."

"No," he told her. "I don't want money and you need it. Besides, the work is all yours. It was in your mind all along. All Leslie and I did was draw it out and show it to you."

"You're a doll," said Jeannette impulsively. She gave him a hug, meant to kiss him, but was thrust gently and firmly aside.

"But I was only going to . . ." she began, gave it up.

"I know," he told her softly. "Oh, I know, damn you." With which he turned abruptly and strode from the studio. Jeannette sat down on the sofa and lit a cigarette and made faces at nothing.

The incident marked an abrupt boundary in her relationship with Tony. He stayed away from the studio for several days afterward and she did a lot of thinking. Her intentions had been motivated entirely by gratitude — or had they? Madge's insinuations shook a finger at her for her hypocrisy.

Considering Tony she again wondered how she could ever have thought him ugly. In his strange way he was, she now realized, the most arrestingly beautiful human being she had ever seen. She had known this, even if she had not acknowledged it, when she tried to embrace him. Then too, she might have been moved by the long-neglected and utterly normal physical needs of a perfectly normal young woman of twenty-eight.

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And she thought of Tony, of the motives behind his pushing her away so abruptly. He knew he was mad, of course, even though he resolutely refused to admit it. Knowing it, he must have decided that physical love was never for him — and with his madness encased by a perfectly normal young male body he must have felt he could not risk even the slightest chance of arousing neglected instinct through physical contact.

Some evenings later, after Mr. Farquarson had as usual taken her measure at sniff, she found herself saying to him across the dominoes, "What about Tony and — well, and girls?"

He eyed her with the quizzical interest of the old and wise, then said gently, "I don't know, Jenny — it's been very much on my mind, of course. As far as we know there's nothing physically wrong with Tony. He's simply never shown any interest in women — until you, of course." He paused, added, "At first I hoped . . . " let his voice trail off.

"I'm sorry," said Jeannette and meant it — meant it so deeply that she had to flee upstairs to her rooms lest she burst into tears in front of the old man. She thought, *Poor Tony.*

The following morning a determined Jeannette got to work. It was ridiculous, she told herself, for an artist of her training and talent to sit around awaiting the inspirational whims of a madman. Three days later she gave up. She was sitting there, wondering why she had ever thought she could be a sculptor, trying not to look at the ghastly melange of half-baked modelings she had achieved, when Tony entered the studio without warning. He said, "You need our help," and sat down.

Jeannette could only look at him and nod. Tony's mere presence seemed to iron out all the rumpled tangle of her thoughts and feelings and frustrations. She went willingly into the trance-like state that made three-way silent conversation possible between Leslie, Tony and herself.

Then it was over and Tony moved toward the sketch-pad. He began to draw as before, quickly, deftly, surely, and Jeannette watched the shape within her head take effortless form on the paper. Finished, he looked up at her, his light eyes unreadable. "This is it?" he stated rather than asked.

She nodded, marvelling at his drawing, said, "Tony, I'm so grateful."

He rose, his face alight with pleasure and all at once she had her arms tightly around him and her lips reached for and found his. For a brief moment his response was so powerful, so consuming, that she felt a pang of panic before thought was swept away in a flood of feeling.

Then suddenly he had thrust her roughly away, his face a twisted mask of disgust, was slapping her fiercely back and forth with open palm. "You dirty thing," he said in rhythm with his stinging hand. "You dirty *dirty* thing! Don't *ever* try that again with me — not *ever!*"

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He stopped slapping her, stepped back, looked at her with something close to horror for a long terrible second, then turned and loped out, whimpering as he went. Numbly Jeannette made a move after him, gave up to sink on the sofa, her burning face in her hands.

Later she called Charley, said, "I'm much too good for you but if you still think you want me say when and where." And that night, back in her own studio, she told him the whole story.

"I love you, Jenny," he said simply. "If it took a shock like this to make you want me I'm glad it happened, that's all."

Jeannette refused to marry him but they decided to take a six-week vacation period he had coming on a trip to Mexico. Jeannette made the arrangements by telephone with a travel agency. It was, she thought as she prepared to pick up and pay for the tickets on the eve of their departure, like a honeymoon.

She had just finished outlining her lips with lipstick when the downstairs doorbell rang. Charley had promised to leave his office early to help her pack. She pressed the admittance buzzer before she remembered that she had given him a key.

She was shaking with panic when she opened the door, her anticipation so dreadful that it was almost a relief to find Jeff again on her threshold. He said, "Hello, Miss Rainey, how've you been?"

"Fine, Jeff, just fine," she said stiffly. "And you?"

"Okay, Miss Rainey. Tony asked me to give you this." He thrust a bulky envelope at her, then turned and left.

As soon as she saw the name of the travel agency on its flap she knew what was in it. She had convinced Charley that they should spend on their trip exactly what she was to receive for the first statue. "It's the only way I can get it out of my system," she had told him.

But here were the tickets — paid for by Tony or his uncle. Jeannette sank into a chair, sick with comprehension. She knew now that Tony was not mad. Rather he was in contact with life on some alien plane, had lost all feeling for this one. How he must hate the body that bound him to Earth! That body was real, had feelings, instincts. It had needed a pet — herself — and the pet had gone too far.

With sudden shocking clarity she saw why he had slapped her, why he was paying for her trip with Charley — just as a female dog in heat must either be bred or spayed.

Rising, she put the envelope in her bag. She was going with Charley, was going to give him the best time possible. But she could never marry him — or anyone. She moved to the front window in time to see a black Rolls Royce swing around the corner and out of sight up Fifth Avenue.

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